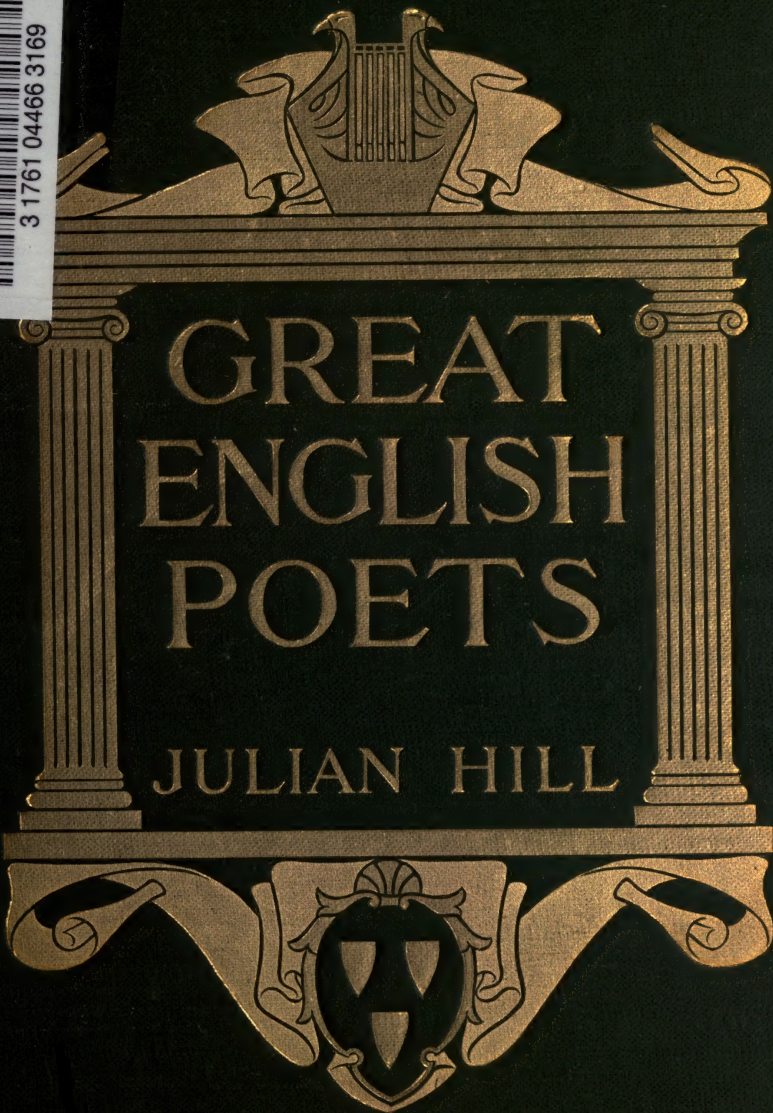


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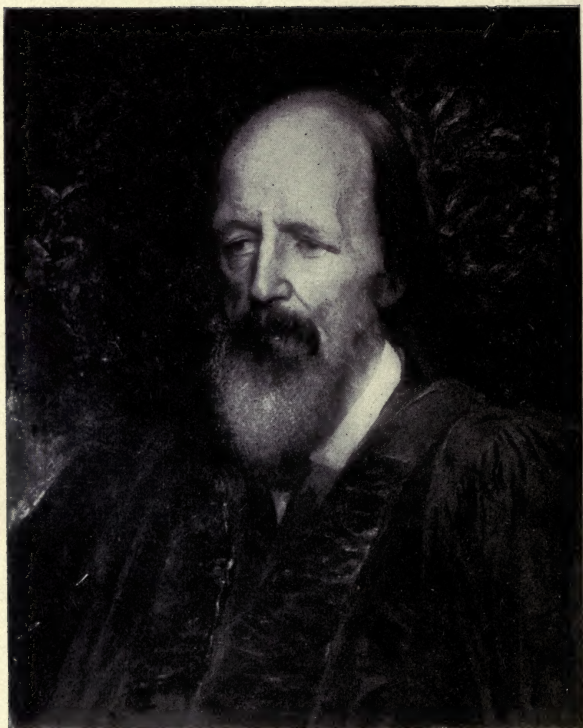
GREAT
ENGLISH
POETS

JULIAN HILL



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After G. F. Watts, R.A.

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GREAT ENGLISH POETS

BY
JULIAN HILL



WITH THIRTY-THREE ILLUSTRATIONS

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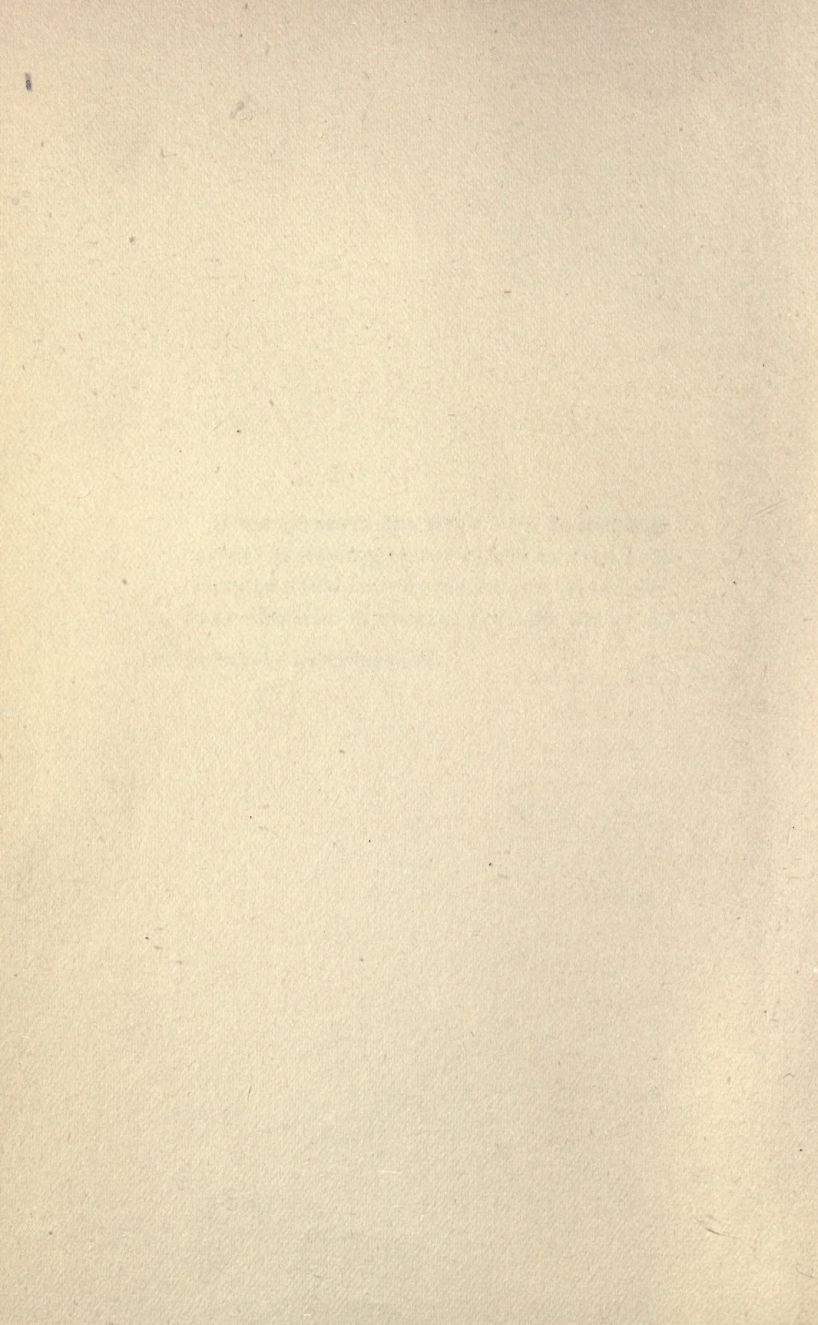
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BLESSINGS BE WITH THEM AND ETERNAL PRAISE,
WHO GAVE US NOBLER LOVES, AND NOBLER CARES—
THE POETS, WHO ON EARTH HAVE MADE US HEIRS
OF TRUTH AND PURE DELIGHT BY HEAVENLY LAYS.

WORDSWORTH (*Personal Talk*).



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NOTE

NINETEEN English poets are discussed in the following pages. The author makes haste to grant that, in an ideal treatment of the subject, the number would be either a little smaller or a great deal larger. Either Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper, Byron, would have to be excluded, or Collins, Thomson, Campbell, and a host of their peers admitted. But, even if the writing of an ideal book on the English poets were within the author's ability, such a work lies outside his present intention.

This volume has been conceived in a homely spirit. The names of all the poets whose lives and works it describes are household words. It may be true that Chaucer and Spenser are better known by pictures of "The Canterbury Pilgrims" and "The Faërie Queen" than by the poems themselves; that Shakespeare and Milton are more praised than read; that Dryden and Pope are generally neither read nor praised, but merely remembered; that Goldsmith's "Traveller" and "The

Deserted Village" are kept alive mainly as school "Readers"; that Gray survives in a single poem; that Chatterton is known not by his works but by his life, and especially by his death; that Cowper's fame is oddly supported on a few hymns and "John Gilpin"; and that Shelley draws a larger audience by an earthly little album ditty than by his heavenly answer to the songs of the skylark. Nevertheless, the nineteen poets hereinafter portrayed are, each and every one of them, poets upon whom, for a medley of reasons, the people have fastened immortality; and, although the people are generally wrong about their contemporaries, they are generally right about their forerunners. Indeed, when for generation after generation it goes on sounding the same literary verdict, the voice of the people is indeed the voice of God.

But, although the nineteen poets of this book are the poets whom the people want to hear about, the author cannot hope that he has written down only such things as the people want to hear. La Rochefoucauld slyly declared that most of us have sufficient fortitude to endure the miseries of others; and, on this principle, certain writers of poets' biographies have indulged themselves freely in the subtle joy of ex-

aggerating their heroes' hungerings and thirstings and shiverings. The nineteen chapters which follow this Note will show that, with the certain exception of the ill-starred Chatterton and the doubtful exception of the unworldly Blake, the great English poets either made, or had fair chances of making, all the money they needed. Sundry well-worn anecdotes have therefore been excluded from these pages. Doubly untruthful, both as history and as criticism, their absence will not be deplored by a single sound-hearted reader. For surely it is good to know that the poets who have bequeathed to us so much delight did not themselves fret and ache in perennial misery, singing, each and every one of them, with a lump in his throat.

As for the critical passages of his nineteen chapters, the author has written them in the same spirit as the biographical. That is to say, he has tried to pay due homage to the poets' masterpieces without shutting his eyes to the weaknesses and dullnesses of their journey-work. He takes leave to add that not one of his few critical novelties has been introduced for novelty's sake.

Outside a bald work of reference, it would be difficult to write of nineteen poets in particular without betraying one's bias as to poetry in general.

Accordingly it may be well to state, in words borrowed from Milton and Keats, that throughout this book the poems which are joys for ever are assumed to be only those poems which are simple, sensuous, impassioned things of beauty. In other words, the proud title of a great English poet is yielded only grudgingly in the following pages to such writers as have lacked that indefinable spirit of which Edmund Spenser received from the gods a double portion. Praise is stinted herein both to those who wrote their verses too painfully and to those who poured them out too glibly. Again, little enthusiasm is shown for those who have enriched English literature by precious thoughts in verse which had been as well or better uttered in prose. A great poet must have great things to say: but he must say them greatly and in a poet's fashion.

Re-perusing English poetry on these lines, the author has not felt able, for instance, to applaud the attempts which are being made to revive the vogue of Byron. Nor has he, even after making the fullest allowance for changes and advances in poetical craftsmanship, succeeded in wholly maintaining his young admiration for Robert Browning. On the face of it all this may savour of bigotry and unprogressiveness ;

but the fact remains that the few Englishmen whose poetical fame is unquenchable have shared, without exception, Spenser's magical and haunting gift. Abstract definitions of poetry, such as "the exquisite expression of exquisite impressions," carry one hardly an inch farther: for a definition of "exquisite" has still to be made. Challenged to declare what one means by true English poetry, one can only reply in the concrete and say, "I mean this line in Keats, this rhythm in Coleridge, this epithet or phrase or stanza in Milton, or Shakespeare, or Blake." A few such glories of poesy have been noted in the following studies.

It will be observed that an attempt has been made to treat the nineteen poets not only chronologically but as interlinked in a chain. It was originally intended to add very short studies of the more interesting minor poets, hanging them, so to speak, upon the main chain like seals and lockets and cameos: but space has compelled the holding over of these short studies for another volume.

JULIAN HILL.

Felpham, Sussex.

July, 1907.



GEOFFREY CHAUCER

HALF a millennium has worn away since the Father of English Poetry died. His birth dates back to the epoch which most people still think of and speak of as "the dark ages." Yet it is possible not only to redraw the main outlines of his life but even to fill in a score of intimate details. The spot where Chaucer was born can still be traced in Walbrook, where the South-Eastern Railway approaches Cannon Street. The spot where he died, once occupied by a comfortable house within the precincts of Westminster Abbey, is even more safe from oblivion ; for it has been ceiled in during four hundred years by the glorious vaults of King Henry the Seventh's Chapel. Chaucer drew his first breath about 1340, his last on an October day in 1400 ; and many a faded document survives to tell of his doings and sufferings, and goings and comings,

and ups and downs during the three-score years of his life.

We know the names and callings of his parents and grandparents. Again, in the household accounts of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, who had married a son of King Edward the Third, we can turn to more than one entry concerning clothes for young Geoffrey, who seems to have been a page in the princely train. Records abound of the offices which the poet filled, of the journeys he made, and of the moneys he received ; and, with all these side-lights upon the self-disclosure made in his works, Chaucer stands before us as a living and breathing man rather than as a misty shape moving vaguely in the dim beginnings of literary history.

It is a pity that Chaucer is still frequently neglected by lovers of poetry through the mistaken belief that his poems, so far as the modern reader is concerned, are written in a dead language. Through timidity or indolence many people still take Shakespeare as the starting-point of English literature, protesting that even Spenser is too archaic for their understanding or their enjoyment. Such slackness is hardly

consistent. Admirers of Robert Browning, the poet who frankly stated that he "did not write poetry for an idle man as a substitute for a cigar," willingly exercise their brains in order to follow their idol's twists and turns of thought; admirers of Burns cheerfully learn a sufficiency of the eighteenth-century Scots in which all his noteworthy poems were written; and admirers of Mr. Rudyard Kipling's ballads, including gently-bred ladies, have not disdained a little instruction in Cockney slang. Yet the same people grudge the same amount of time and trouble to Chaucer. Probably they over-estimate the difficulties of Middle English. Let them face the task and they will find it neither hard nor dry; for, after a few prime facts and rules have been firmly grasped, they can plunge at once into Chaucer's greatest poem as their best and easiest text-book.

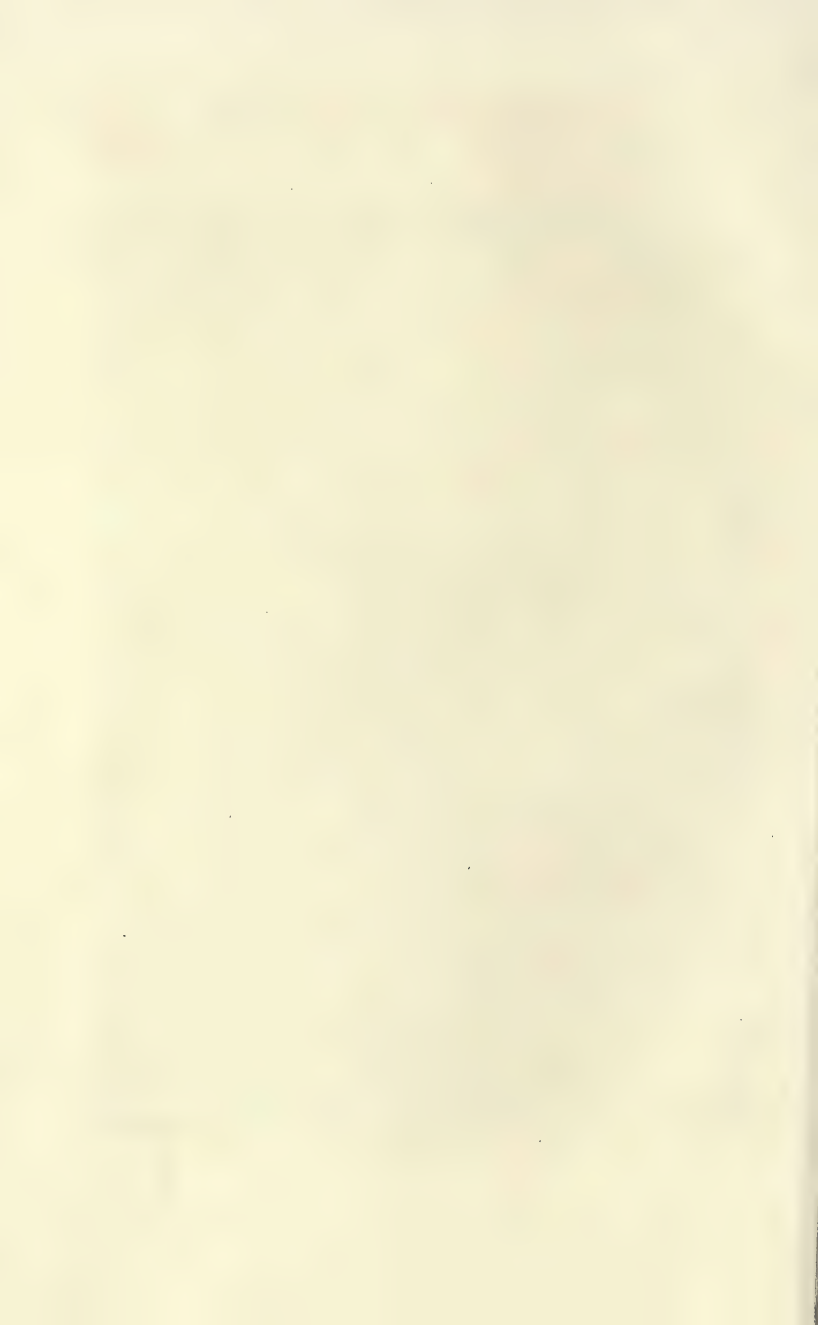
Although William Cowper wrote many respectable verses after drinking nothing stronger than dishes of tea, and although certain living bards are reputed to find inspiration in black brews of mere coffee, there has always been a friendship between poetry and wine. Chaucer

was the son of a vintner. He must have learned something of his father's trade ; for in the *Canterbury Tales* he mentions the very wines we drink to-day—the wines of Bordeaux and of Spain—and betrays a knowledge of the mysteries of blending. He was born in the midst of wine ; and wine and he never parted company. Thus, in 1374, King Edward granted him a pitcher of wine a day for life ; and, although in the fourteenth century the Poet Laureateship with its perquisite of a butt of wine had not been invented, it is known that, in 1398, a tun of wine was bestowed upon Chaucer by Richard the Second. And it is not a far-fetched suggestion that a childhood spent among the hogsheads and leather bottles of his father's shop was one source of the jollity and openness of mind so characteristic of his works.

Unlike the poets of a hundred years ago, who deliberately sought exciting adventures in foreign climes as part of their poetical training, the youth Chaucer had adventures thrust upon him. He was hardly out of his teens before he found himself a prisoner in the hands of the French. King Edward, however, not only gave £16



THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMS.
(After Richard Corbould.)



towards his ransom, but eventually took him into his own service.

But not as Court poet. As a valet of the royal chamber, the young man's duties included such unlyrical tasks as making the bed. Nevertheless the atmosphere of the Court was not illiterate. Although there were a hundred years to run before the invention of printing, MS. copies of new books circulated throughout Christendom in large numbers and with surprising rapidity. Everybody at King Edward's Court was reading or listening to the Norman-French *Roman de la Rose*, and there is little doubt that an abridged English version of this curiously compounded work was one of Chaucer's earliest attempts in literature.

But Norman-French was nearing the end of its domination in England. After a battle three centuries long, the English tongue was once more becoming the language of the nation. A year or two before Chaucer entered the King's service, Parliament had been opened with a speech in English, and the time was ripe for the founding of a national school of poetry.

In our own days, when nations are growing

self-conscious, it is sometimes claimed that the moment has come for some particular race to establish or revive its truly national music, or literature, or painting. "Movements" are set going : and they generally come to a dead halt, for the simple reason that the Hour has arrived without the Man. But, in the fourteenth century, the man was at hand ; and Chaucer made his epoch as much as his epoch made Chaucer.

Among people who never read him, there is a curious notion that Chaucer was merely a teller of stories in verse, telling a tale simply for the tale's sake. There can be no greater error. He was as fastidious a literary artist as Tennyson, and the first of his great English poems, *The Book of the Duchess*, is as far as possible from the ballad-maker's rudeness. If the poets of France and Italy had been able to read it, they would have been forced to admit that they had a brother and an equal in England. And this is why Chaucer is justly honoured as the Father of English poetry—not merely because his work is truly English, but because it is truly poetry as well.

By the time he began *The Book of the Duchess*,

Chaucer had ceased to make beds and had risen to be a "royal squire." He was sent abroad on diplomatic missions, and is supposed to have met Petrarch in Italy. Every genuine poet who visits Italy comes back more of a poet for his journey ; and Chaucer was no exception. No doubt he would hear much talk of Boccaccio and his "Decameron": and Boccaccio's happy notion of setting a band of people to tell stories may have suggested to Chaucer the band of motley pilgrims taking turns to tell the *Canterbury Tales*. This, however, is not to say that the Englishman was the Italian's imitator or inferior ; for, on the contrary, Chaucer's plan is larger and his execution is marked by a dramatic development and unity of which Boccaccio did not dream.

Not every poet has had the good luck to be a poet pure and simple—a poet by profession. Just as Burns was a farmer and an exciseman, Chaucer, at the time when he was near his poetical best, was called to waste his years as Comptroller of the Customs and "Subsidy of Wools, Skins and Leather" for the Port of London. Unlike the famous sinecure of "Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland"

enjoyed by Wordsworth, Chaucer's duty could not be done by deputy and he was forced to grind through his routine work in person. He has left us this unfading little picture of the poor city man or clerk who longs all day for the evening hour when he will exchange the ledger for "another book" on themes higher than merchandise and money :—

. . . when thy labour done all is,
And hast y-madë reckonings,
Instead of rest and newë things
Thou go'st home to thy house anon
And there, as dumb as any stone,
Thou sittest at another book.

Again, he confesses that he used to read until he became dazed. His was the robust originality which is not afraid to expose itself to the influences of other minds ; and he enriched the future of poetry by not disdaining the present and the past. But he knew where books should end and where thought and feeling should begin : and Londoners remembered him as "a large man with an elvish look" who walked staring on the ground "as if he would find a hare." When May came, he protests that no book could

detain him from the singing birds and the springing flowers : and he spoke finely of Nature as "the vicar of the Almighty Lord."

Irksome though his official duties were, nevertheless they were an indispensable training for the grand work of his life. No mere literary man shut up among books could have written the *Canterbury Tales*. Had the *Tales* been finished, they would have formed the completest picture of the end of the Middle Ages ever painted ; and it was necessary that their author should gather materials by living a great deal of varied life. His frequent journeys on political errands threw him among all kinds of scenery and all kinds of people. Like Leonardo da Vinci, he was an engineer as well as an artist : and, after he had ceased to be Comptroller of Customs, he received two shillings a day (equal, in purchasing power, to twenty shillings in the twentieth century) as Clerk of the Works at St. George's Chapel, Windsor. He was also appointed to supervise the mending of the banks of the Thames. Hence it came to pass that he knew the crude thoughts of navvies as well as he knew the tortuous diplomacy of kings : with the result that

his masterpiece is broad and human instead of being, like so many of the works of his contemporaries, narrow and merely aristocratic.

Books, solitary thought, bustling and varied life—all these elements in the making of a poet were abundantly granted to Chaucer. But it does not appear that he was fortunate in obtaining the poet's crowning endowment of love. The matter is obscure: but, if his own words mean anything, he endured eight years of unrequited affection. It is also believed that his marriage was unhappy: but this conjecture may be groundless, and, although sundry lines in his poems seem to lend it support, it is quite credible that Chaucer belonged to the large class of husbands who make joking complaint of their servitude and misery while in truth they are snugly happy. In any case it is certain that Chaucer was a proud and affectionate father, as appears from the prose *Treatise on the Astrolabe* which he wrote for his little son, Lewis. Five hundred years have failed to evaporate the sweetness from the opening words of the *Treatise*. It begins:—

“Little Lowis, my son, I have perceived wel by cer-

teyne evidences thyn abilitie to lerne sciencez touching noumbres and proporciouns."

Of course the *Treatise* is no longer of scientific value : but there is still something to be learned from it as regards the true spirit and method of conveying truth to a childish mind.

Under King Richard the Second, Chaucer enjoyed many favours. He even sat in Parliament as a knight of the shire for Kent. He stood well with the Queen, Anne of Bohemia, and must have been almost a rich man. Despite innumerable grants and pensions he contrived, however, to taste of that frequently recurring impecuniosity in which so many of the English poets have faithfully imitated their father and master. It stands in black and white that he often anticipated his pension by coaxing for a little bit on account ; that he pledged the said pension to two money-lenders ; and that he was sued by some irreverent creditor for £14. 1s. 11d. On the accession of King Henry the Fourth, Chaucer was ready and waiting, primed with the MS. of a still extant poem known as *The Complaint of Chaucer to His Empty Purse* : and before the new monarch had reigned four days

he responded by doubling the complainant's pension. It follows that true poverty, like true love, cannot be confidently reckoned among the forces which compelled this poet to produce his poems.

The two greatest and most ambitious of Chaucer's works are both unfinished. The first of these, the *Legend of Good Women*, is remarkable not only for its contents but for its point of view. Chaucer's "good women" are not the saints and virgins of the ecclesiastical calendar: they are Cleopatra, "the Martyr Queen of Egypt"; Thisbe, "the Martyr of Babylon"; Dido, Alcestis, Ariadne, Lucretia. That the sprightly Cleopatra was both a good woman and a martyr is a little staggering at first sight even in our degenerate day: but Chaucer's test of his good women seems to have been their fidelity to romantic love. This alone would suffice to prove that they are wrong who neglect Chaucer as the poet of a dead world. He belongs far less to the Middle Ages than to the Renaissance.

As for the *Canterbury Tales*, they have steadily waxed in renown throughout five centuries and they are trebly sure of immortality. To the

historian who cares for human facts more than for mere names and dates they are among the most precious of documents ; to the genuine philologist they are eloquent with the birth-cries of the noblest literary language ever written or spoken ; and to the simple lover of poetry they are beyond price as the legacy of one who was the first of our great poets in the order of time and only second to Shakespeare in the order of merit.

It is true that there were Anglo-Saxon poets before Chaucer just as there were brave men before Agamemnon. But the gems discoverable among the relics of these early bards are so few and far between that only the literary antiquary has the time and patience to find them. In Chaucer the beauties throng as thickly as the flowers in a June garden ; and one might almost as well close one's eyes to the crisp greenness of an English spring as close one's ears, as so many do, to the bright music of Chaucer's verses.

EDMUND SPENSER

OF a surpassingly great poet it may be said that he is all things to all men. As they read his verses, lovers sound deeper depths of love, warriors hunger and thirst more keenly for danger. To commune with the spirit of the greatest poets is to drink so deeply of a magic draught that, thenceforward, every one who has dipped his cup in the fountain walks under a grander sun and under a softer moon.

But the poets who are so great as to be universal in their appeal are so few that they can be counted on the fingers of one hand—with a finger or two to spare. Speaking generally, a poet speaks warmly to one sex, or to one class, or to one race, or to one time of life, leaving his other readers cold. For examples, Homer is a man's poet; Byron, when he is serious, is a youth's poet. And there have been women's poets, young ladies' poets, scholars' poets,

courtiers' poets, sweethearts' poets, and, indeed, a poet for every sort and condition of man. Edmund Spenser is one of these class bards : but he sings to the proudest class of them all, for his fame is secure as "The Poets' Poet." Even if the rank and file who read him so little ceased to read him altogether, he would still be able to claim a kind of indirect universality, for he would remain one of the living forces of English literature, working through generation after generation of poets who will always turn to him for example and for delight.

Curious discoveries reward the investigator who goes up and down with his ears wide open : and the writer of these pages has found by experiment that many otherwise intelligent people relegate Spenser to a dusty shelf in the lumber-room or old curiosity-shop of poetry in the belief that he was merely a later and slighter Chaucer telling a tiresome tale in obsolete and ill-spelt English. Such people would do well to take a pencil and a scrap of paper and to work out one or two very easy sums. Among other enlightening results they would find that there is as great an interval of years between Chaucer and Spenser

as there is between Milton and Mr. Swinburne, or between Shakespeare and Wordsworth. Further, Chaucer was bred in the age of faith, amid the unity of Western Christendom, whereas Spenser was bred an inquiring Protestant amid the Elizabethan atmosphere which began to make England an island in the matter of national ideals and temperament as well as in geographical position. It is true that the two centuries which divide Chaucer from Spenser had been barren of great poets and great poetry : but it is false to assume that Spenser simply took poetry up where Chaucer laid it down. *The Faërie Queen* is not a belated instalment, with new scenes and personages, of *The Canterbury Tales* on the to-be-continued-in-our-next principle. It is a new thing, animated by a new spirit.

For a long time it was believed that Spenser was born in the year 1553 : but most of his recent biographers have altered the date to 1552 on the strength of the following lines in a sonnet addressed to the Irish maid whom the poet married in 1594 :—

. . . one year is spent

The which doth longer unto me appear

Than all those forty which my life outwent.

But, seriously, this is shaky ground on which to base a revision of the traditional date. Poetic licence would surely justify Spenser in writing the round number "forty" instead of trying to cram into the rigid limits of his sonnet the more unmanageable syllables of the prosaically exact "thirty-nine." When biographers go about their work in so literal a fashion one is tempted to wish that only poets should be allowed to write other poets' lives.

Like Chaucer, Spenser was born in London : but he was at pains to assert a relationship with the Spencers of Althorp, whose noble line has persisted down to our own days. Seeing that the times were lax as regards the spelling of names, it is difficult to understand why Spenser did not strengthen his pretensions by changing his London "s" for the Althorp "c." But young Edmund's entrance into life was made humbly. From Merchant Taylors', his school, (where a record exists concerning two yards of cloth for a funeral gown given to Edmund Spenser,) he went in 1569, as a poor scholar, to Pembroke College, Cambridge.

Spenser remained at Cambridge until 1576,

when he took his Master's degree. But it does not appear that he became a genuinely learned man. His works are rife with inaccuracies, some of which, unlike Shakespeare's, offend the reader. For example, the last line of the noble fragment on Mutabilitie—in many respects the most deeply thought and loftily expressed of all his writings—is spoilt by what is either an ill-placed pun or a piece of ignorance. Spenser exclaims:—

O, Sabaoth's God, grant me that Sabbath's sight !

as though "Sabaoth's God"—that is to say, "the God of Hosts"—is an interchangeable expression for "Sabbath's God"—that is to say, the God who ordained the Sabbath, or seventh day, of rest.

But, although he did not become minutely learned, the poor scholar made good friends at Cambridge, notably Gabriel Harvey. There is fairly conclusive evidence that in 1569, between school and university, Spenser had been employed, as a nameless hack, to translate certain poems of Petrarch ; and it was clearly understood by Harvey and his circle that the young man had literary intentions. They believed, however, in common with Sir Philip Sidney, who eventually

became Spenser's patron, that the way of salvation for English poetry ran through un-English regions. That is to say, they preached the imitation of Italian models, denounced "barbarous rymes," and tried to impose artificial laws of quantity upon vernacular poets. In his *Areopagus*, Sidney taught these evil doctrines with so much enthusiasm that, for a time, Spenser fell into heresy and wrote worthless verses in the Italian style under the affected and exotic name of "Immerito."

Mists hang over Spenser's whereabouts and doings soon after his departure from Cambridge. But the mists serve to make more magical the one sure fact which beams through them. During an absence, for some purpose unknown, somewhere or other in the north of England, Spenser fell magnificently in love. His beloved, a mysterious Rosalind, "the widow's daughter of the glen," paid him compliments but refused him her hand. A great deal of poetry sprang from the affair; and the fidelity with which Spenser claimed to adore her memory almost to the end of his days seems to have been something better than literary affectation.

Returning to the south, the despairing lover tried to mend his heart not only with the priceless friendship of Sidney but also with the smiles of another lady. To his friends, who knew all about the hard-hearted Rosalind in the north, he was so wholly unabashed in calling the new beauty his "corculum"—which is very ugly Latin for "sweetheart"—that Harvey responded by hailing her as "altera Rosalindula"—which is nimble Latin but clumsy gallantry—and as "mea bellissima Colina Clouta."

"Colina Clouta," of course, is a playful feminine form of Colin Clout, the bucolic name assumed by Spenser for the purposes of his first considerable poem, *The Shepherd's Calendar*. The *Calendar* appeared in 1580. For prudential reasons the poet's name was not on the title-page: for the text contained a chivalrous mention of Spenser's old patron, Bishop Grindal (thinly dissembled as Algrind), who had fallen into disfavour at Court. Instead of Spenser's name, the book bore the initials "E. K," which stood for Edward Kirke, who introduced the poem in glowing language. The *Calendar* was suggested by the agricultural and astrological almanacs which were the fore-

runners of "Old Moore." It contains twelve poems, one for each month in the year, and is as good as Spenser could make it, considering that he still felt bound to swaddle an English work in classical clothes and also to conform to the affectation which turned the whole world into a pastoral scene and made shepherds and shepherdesses of all the men and women in it.

The *Calendar* was well received ; and although its authorship was not certainly known by everybody, Spenser had good reasons for expecting rewards at Court or in the public service. For a time he lived in daily hope of a mission to France. But the Fates willed that he should imagine the bloody emprises of his faerie knights among wilder and darker scenes ; and he was dispatched with Lord Grey, of Wilton, to Ireland.

Whatever may be his views as to the measures which ought to be adopted in the future, every fair-minded student is compelled to admit the historical fact that, whether through English misgovernment or through Irish obstinacy, Ireland has truly been for hundreds of years "the most distressful country that ever yet was seen." In

the notes on Ireland which Spenser left in MS. at his death occurs this remarkable passage :—

Marry, soe there have been divers good plottes and wise counsellis cast allready about reformation of that realme; but they say it is the fatall desteny of that land that noe purposes, whatsoever are meant for her good, will prosper or take good effect; which, whether it proceede from the very Genius of the soyle, or influence of the starres, or that Allmighty God hath not yet appointed the time of her reformation, or that He reserveth her in this unquiett state still for some secret scourdge which shall by her come unto England, it is hard to be knowen but yet much to be feared.

The “unquiett state” in which Grey, as Lord Deputy, and Spenser, as his secretary, found the Isle of Saints was mainly due to the rebellion under the Earl of Desmond. In its own turn, Desmond’s rebellion was largely due to the pouring of the oil of religious controversy upon the ever-smouldering Irish hatred of English rule. The struggle was to the death on both sides, as Spenser saw with his own eyes. On the one hand he was probably present at the defeat of Glenmalure when the English fell into a deadly ambush; while, on the other hand, he seems to have assisted at Lord Grey’s capture of the fort of Smerwick, and at the cold-blooded

massacre of the hundreds of brave Spaniards and Irishmen who had formed its garrison.

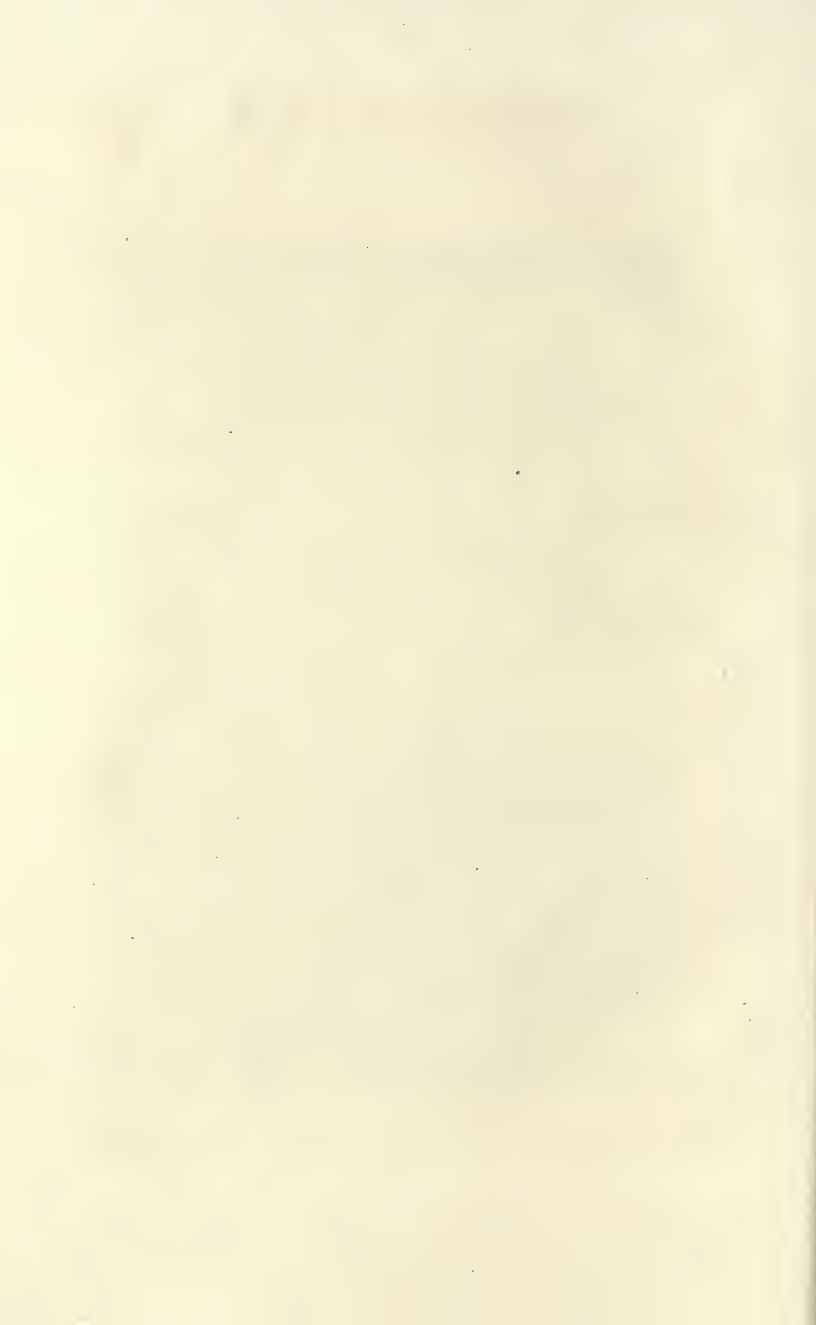
In such times men did not go to Ireland for pleasure, and Spenser must not be too severely blamed for having looked after himself whenever there was a division of spoil. When the Plantation of Munster was in course of arrangement, Spenser was admitted as an "undertaker," a word which needs some explanation. As a result of the long unsparing conflict, vast tracts in Munster had been so completely desolated that one might ride over them all day without seeing a cultivated acre or a standing roof-tree or a domestic animal. Munster was accordingly mapped out into "seignories" of from three thousand to twelve thousand acres each, and these seignories were assigned on alluring terms to personages in England on condition that they should re-populate Munster with English farmers and labourers. Of course the scheme failed, and Munster and Connaught, the two provinces against which the generals of Elizabeth and of the Commonwealth launched their most relentless severity, are still the two hardest nuts the British Government has to crack. But, for

a time, the plantation promised to succeed ; and when Spenser "undertook" to assist he received three thousand acres lying round Kilcolman, a ruined house of the Desmonds, under the Galtee Hills, between Mallow and Limerick. Kilcolman is dreary enough nowadays : but in 1586, when Spenser entered into possession, its dreaming lake and tumbling waters and old-grown trees made it something better than the worst of homes for a poet. Indeed, placed as it was in the midst of the fightings and alarums, it is hard to imagine a more fitting spot than lonely, perilous Kilcolman for the writing of a broad, slowly-moving poem of knightly adventure like *The Faërie Queen*.

What had become of the poor "corculum," the "bellissima Colina Clouta," nobody knows. It has been suggested that Spenser married her : but beyond the fact that he ought to have done so, there is no indication that he did. Apparently Spenser dwelt solitarily in the wilds, building up *The Faërie Queen* line by line, stanza by stanza, canto by canto, book by book. He had begun the poem about 1580, before he sailed for Ireland, and in spite of Harvey's solemn entreaties to go on Italianizing and to let "the elvish queen" alone.



EDMUND SPENSER'S HOME, KILCOLMAN.
(After William Havell.)



Upon Spenser's solitude, in 1589, broke one of the greatest Englishmen who ever lived—a man whose life is more crowded with excitements than the lives of all the great English poets put together. This man was Sir Walter Raleigh. It was the year after the defeat of the Armada, and although the *Ark Raleigh* had borne the admiral's flag against the Spaniard, he was in disgrace. Raleigh was visiting his Irish seignory with some money-making plan of supplying Irish pipe-staves for the French and Spanish wine-trade: but in the course of his journey he made the greatest discovery of his adventurous life. He discovered *The Faërie Queen*.

Perhaps it would be too much to say that *The Faërie Queen* might have been lost to the world if Raleigh, who was as great a critic as he was a soldier, a sailor, and a courtier, had not perused it at Kilcolman. Still the risk was great. Without Raleigh's praise and friendly pressure, it is conceivable that Spenser would have worked on in the hope of finishing his poem and that it would have perished in the sack and burning of Kilcolman in 1598. What actually happened was that Spenser came immediately to London with the first three books of the *Queen*, and that

this first instalment was published in 1590. And on one point at least Raleigh's importance in the affair is beyond dispute. It was at his instance that Spenser furnished the key to the poem at the outset, although he had intended only to give it in the twelfth book, which he never lived to write.

On his own confession, Spenser's poem is an ethical allegory. He imagined a "faërie queen" who, on the twelve successive days of her annual festival, sent twelve knights on twelve adventures. Each knight was intended to embody some manly virtue: and by imagining these twelve virtues summed up in one hero the reader would compose a picture of the ideal knight or of the perfect Christian gentleman.

Although *The Faërie Queen* as we have it to-day—that is to say, the three books published in 1590, the three books published in 1596, and the fragments of a seventh book found after Spenser's death—is so long that the man who has read it straight through is regarded as a literary prodigy, only about one-fourth of the projected work was executed. Nevertheless the poet wrote quite as much as his allegory would stand. It is full of pictures and full of music: but it is out of touch

with life, like the still longer romances of chivalry which Cervantes was slashing to pieces by his satire in Spain at the very moment when Spenser was sedulously re-embroidering them in Ireland. For poets, *The Faërie Queen* will abide an ever-green, enchanted, melodious wood ; but it has never been and never will be a seashore or a mountain-top where plain men and women may soothe or stir up their souls.

Like Horace and Ovid, Spenser knew that he had compassed immortality. Here is the dedication of his work :—

To

The Most High, Mightie, & Magnificent
Empresse

Renowned for piety, virtue & all gracious government

ELIZABETH

By the Grace of God

Queene of England, Fraunce & Ireland, & of Virginia,
Defendour of the Faith, &c.

Her most humble servant

Edmund Spenser

Doth, in all humilitie,

Dedicate, present & consecrate

These his labours

To live with the Eternitie of Her Fame.

As every reader of the poem knows, *The Faërie Queen* abounds in that overblown adulation of

Elizabeth which the Queen exacted on every hand. But, in Spenser's case, the flattery did not fail of its mark : for Gloriana, as he had named the virgin monarch, awarded him a pension of £50 a year, to the disgust of the Lord Treasurer.

The publication of *The Faërie Queen* evoked more praise than could have been expected by any one save the poet himself. Even the classical Harvey was so far converted as to write a laudatory poem ; and Spenser, after a stay of a year and a half in England, returned home to pen the account of all he had seen in London known as *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*. But he was not wholly a flattering time-server : and therefore he dealt with the seamy side of Elizabeth's Court in a further poem called *Mother Hubbard's Tale of the Ape and the Fox*.

As a man of forty, Spenser found a wife at last. Although the "planters" of Munster were forbidden to marry with the Irishry, his bride was a daughter of the soil, though probably of a family which had bowed to the English yoke. Like the Rosalind of seventeen years before, at first she repelled her wooer, who seems to have

written of love in others' lives better than he could practise it in his own. But she surrendered in the long run : and it was in her honour that Spenser wrote not only his *Amoretti* sonnets but also the superb *Epithalamium* with its grand lines :—

Open the temple gates unto my love !
Open them wide that she may enter in,
And all the postes adorne as doth behove,
And all the pillows deck with girlands trim,
For to receive this Saynt with honour dew
That cometh in to you.
With trembling steps and humble reverence,
She cometh in before th' Almighty's vew.
Of her, ye virgins, learne obedience,
When so ye come into those holy places
To humble your proud faces.
Bring her up to th' high altar, that she may
The sacred ceremonies there partake,
The which do endlesse matrimony make ;
And let the roring Organs loudly play
The praises of the Lord in lively notes ;
The whiles, with hollow throates,
The Choristers the joyous antheme sing,
That all the woods may answer and their echo ring.

Behold, whiles she before the altar stands,
Hearing the holy priest that to her speakes,
And blesseth her with his two happy hands,
How the red roses flush up in her cheekes,
And the pure snow, with goodly vermill stayne,

Like crimson dyde in grane ;
That even the Angels, which continually
About the sacred altare doe remaine
Forget their service and about her fly,
Ofte peeping in her face that seems more fayre
The more they on it stare.

But he had waited long for what was to be short happiness. Within five years of his marriage, Kilcolman was destroyed and Spenser was dead. We know that two sons were born to him whom he named Sylvanus and Peregrine, meaning "Woodman" and "Pilgrim." We know that he published three more books of *The Faërie Queen*, and *Four Hymns on Love and Beauty, Earthly and Heavenly*. We know that he was designated Sheriff of Cork. The rest is horror. Under a new Earl of Desmond, the Irish in 1598 wrought vengeance upon stolen Kilcolman. Spenser escaped to England, a ruined man, and died the following year in Westminster. According to Ben Jonson, "he died for lack of bread in King Street, and refused twenty pieces sent him by my Lord of Essex saying he had not time to spend them."

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

THE greatest poet who ever put pen to paper, either in England or out of it, lived in health and strength for two-and-fifty years. During half his life he was hard at work upon so many writings that a closely-printed volume of a thousand pages hardly contains them all. Yet he died having published only two tiny volumes of verse which can be perused in an hour. It is true that pirates, during the poet's lifetime, printed copies of all his sonnets and faulty editions of some of his plays: but the fact remains that, even in our poet-scorning twentieth century, many a callow youth has published more verses than William Shakespeare published all the days of his industrious life. And if the reader will keep this fact clearly in mind, he will find that he has the key to nearly all the major Shakespearean puzzles.

Shakespeare was conscious of his greatness. In one of the *Sonnets* he wrote :—

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.

And yet, after he abandoned poetry pure and simple in favour of the poetic drama, he ceased to take himself seriously as an English poet. The printer, the bookseller, and, in one sense, the reviewer were already well-established institutions of which his little brother-poets were taking full advantage : but Shakespeare was content to forgo them all and to fling his pearls before a small houseful of play-goers, many of whom cracked nuts during the poetical passages and shuffled impatiently for the clown.

Not until their author's bones had lain for seven years in the chancel of Stratford Church did the plays of Shakespeare attain to the dignity of lawful print. In 1623 his fellow-actors and literary executors, Heminge and Condell, put forward the famous "First Folio," which has become so precious that millionaires will offer for a copy of it almost as much as they would pay for a race-horse or a second-rate steam-yacht. It is probable that, in correcting some of the plays,

Heminge and Condell had access to the original MSS. and to Shakespeare's own revision of the quarto editions which had been put together by hasty transcribers of the stage copies or by shorthand writers who had attended the performances on the pirates' behalf. But although Heminge and Condell seem to have done their best, the text of Shakespeare has come down to us more battered and maimed than many a writing of the days before the invention of printing. Saving a few printer's errors, we have the precise words of Spenser, a slightly earlier and immeasurably smaller poet. But a thousand perplexities beset the pages of Shakespeare, ranging from such small matters as the spelling of an equivocal word to such huge questions as whether Shakespeare had anything whatever to do with a particular speech, or scene, or act, or even a whole play.

The truth is that Shakespeare did not write, like the book-poets, to be printed and to be read. He wrote to be declaimed and to be heard. No doubt some hope or plan of printing in the long run hovered round his mind : but the slackness or procrastination which ultimately

handed the task over to Heminge and Condell is proof of what has just been said—that Shakespeare did not consciously place himself in the bright succession of Chaucer and Spenser, and that he did not foresee the verdict of posterity which would acclaim him, simply as an English poet, high above them both. If a prophet had whispered in his ear that while his works, as stage-plays, would become a trial to the majority of candid mankind, his glory as a poet would outflame all other glories, ancient and modern ; that his birthplace would be visited and guarded like a holy place ; and that cartloads of commentaries would be written round his works as if they were an inspired writ—if a prophet had whispered all this, what would Shakespeare have answered ? No one knows. But as good an answer as any other is this : that Shakespeare, in his last years, attained to so calm a greatness of soul that his head would not have been turned ; that he would have reduced the works which bear his name by one-half ; that he would have applied to the remainder the unfailing artistry which marks the two little books he deliberately published ; and that the gains of such a self-conscious

revision would have outweighed the heavy losses.

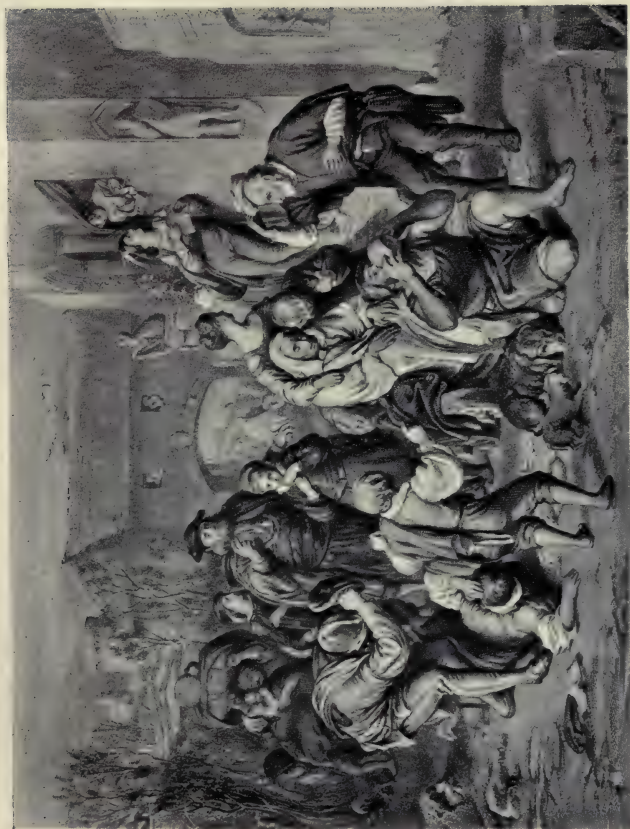
All these might-have-beens, however, have only been indulged in because they suggest the temper in which Shakespeare's superabundant writings may best be read. They suggest that Shakespeare's plays ought to be read, as they were written, rapidly and eagerly, and that there is no irreverence in recognizing the plain truth that they contain thousands of lines which the world could easily do without. The reader who loiters idolatrously round every phrase loses the whole in the parts, and cannot see the wood for the trees, the flowers, the nettles, and the dead branches.

In Shakespeare's case, even dates refuse to be dry. Both his birth and his death occurred on the 23rd of April; and the 23rd of April is the feast of St. George, the patron saint of England. The birth-year was 1564, under the last of the Tudors; the death-year was 1616 under the first of the Stuarts.

Shakespeare's father (butcher, glover, and wool-merchant) does not appear to have been a native of Stratford-on-Avon: but, having chosen

it for his home, at first he prospered in it greatly. He became ale taster, constable, affeeror, chamberlain, alderman, justice of the peace, and high bailiff of the town. He won the hand of a small heiress, with the pretty home-grown name of Mary Arden, who was able to trace her pedigree straight back to King Alfred. William Shakespeare, Mary Arden's son, is not for a nation but for all mankind, just as he is "not of an age but for all time." Nevertheless, Englishmen have the principal part and lot in him : and it is stirring to remember that the most English of poets, who lay new-born and new-dead on the feast of England's saint, was the direct descendant of England's greatest and most English king.

Even if John Shakespeare had foreknown the future of his son he could not have given him a more serviceable education. At Stratford Grammar School the boys were not taught too much ; and plenty of leisure seems to have been available for learning lessons quite as useful as Latin in the streets of the town and in the Forest of Arden and along the banks of the Avon. Hence it came to pass that although the lad grew up



THE SEVEN AGES OF MAN.
("AS YOU LIKE IT.")
After W. Mulready, R.A.

with a habit of never reading Virgil or Ovid in the original when a translation was handy, he also grew up with an all-round knowledge of the chase, of falconry, and of rural sights and sounds. And the sequel justified Dr. Johnson's dictum that "the knowledge of nature is half the task of a poet."

A respectable tradition declares that, after ceasing to be a pupil, Shakespeare became a schoolmaster. It is also said that he understood butchering, and that "when he killed a calf he would do it in a high style and make a speech." But these are unsure traditions. The only certain fact about Shakespeare's youth in Stratford is the painful one of his marriage, under a sort of compulsion, with Anne Hathaway. The bridegroom was eighteen and the bride twenty-six. The wedding seems to have taken place without the knowledge of Shakespeare's parents; and it is a sombre fact that the creator of Juliet, of Ophelia, of Perdita, of Portia, of Viola, was paired for the remaining thirty-four years of his life with a mate to whom he had been drawn by the least noble instinct of his nature. Six months after his marriage a

daughter, Susanna, was born. Twins, a boy and a girl, named Hamnet and Judith, followed in 1585. Hamnet died in boyhood. Susanna and Judith married respectively a physician and a vintner. But, with the death of Susanna's child, Shakespeare's line came to a full stop ; and the poet who had taught in the *Sonnets* that one can only defy the enemy Time by living over and over again in one's children and children's children was beaten after all.

While his twin babes were still in their cradles, a mysterious event drove Shakespeare out of his native town. The present-day traveller who asks the Stratford-on-Avon gamin who Shakespeare was and what he did generally receives the delightful answer that Shakespeare was "the man that stole the deer" ; and, although the story is rejected by a few modern sceptics, the weight of evidence is on the gamin's side. Less than a hundred years after Shakespeare's death, Rowe, echoing the words of Betterton who had talked with old acquaintances of Shakespeare's daughters on the spot, published the tale in his *Account of the Life, etc., of Mr. William Shakespear*. Shakespeare, he says, had aided and abetted

others in poaching on the preserves of Sir Thomas Lucy, the principal landowner of Stratford; and, after being prosecuted, had added insult to injury by poking fun at the plaintiff in comic verses. The end of the affair was a hasty flight out of the wrathful squire's jurisdiction.

Making his way to London, the fugitive is reported to have kept his soul in his body by accepting "mean employment." According to a Stratford parish-clerk who was born before the poet died, Shakespeare "was received into the play-house as a servitor," and a more explicit but respectable tradition boldly declares that it was his duty to stand in the street holding the horses of the theatre's patrons while they were inside. In any case it is beyond dispute that he was soon in touch with playgoers and players.

In these days, when an actor-manager is often a "Sir" in England and an "Excellency" in Germany, it is important to remember that the players of Shakespeare's time were still rogues and vagabonds in the eyes of the law, and that they gave their performances in the fields beyond the walls of London simply because the City

Fathers had driven them out. During Shakespeare's childhood at Stratford, his father as High Bailiff of the town had encouraged the visits of strolling players and had paid them sums of money : but, strictly speaking, actors were still outlaws.

Here is one of the most startling facts in the history of any literature. The two centuries following on the death of Chaucer had been almost blank : the work of Spenser was courtly, literary, and for the few ; and, altogether, poetry in England was generations behind poetry in Italy. Yet, in a single reign, English poetry became the most splendid and vital in the world ; and it was perfected out of the mouths of rogues and vagabonds. It was as though the music-hall "artists" of our own times should suddenly desist from trying to make the English language brutal and ugly and should put into everybody's mouth ballads and lyrics all aglow with such poetic fire as to make the glorious outburst of English poetry which began with Blake and Coleridge seem thin and cold.

The running of the same play for hundreds of nights—a practice which stales our actors and

deaden our drama—was unknown under Queen Elizabeth. Hence there was a brisk demand for new works or for old ones re-furbished ; and there can be little doubt that Shakespeare's first task as a playwright was to overhaul the threadbare plays in the repertory, slashing and patching and re-embroidering until they were made modish and bright. As early as 1592 Greene, one of Shakespeare's predecessors in dramatic poetry, spat words of jealousy at his young rival, calling him

An upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers,
that with his Tiger's heart wrapt in a Player's hide
supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blank
verse as the best of you : and being an absolute
Johannes factotum is, in his own conceit, the only
Shakescene in a country.

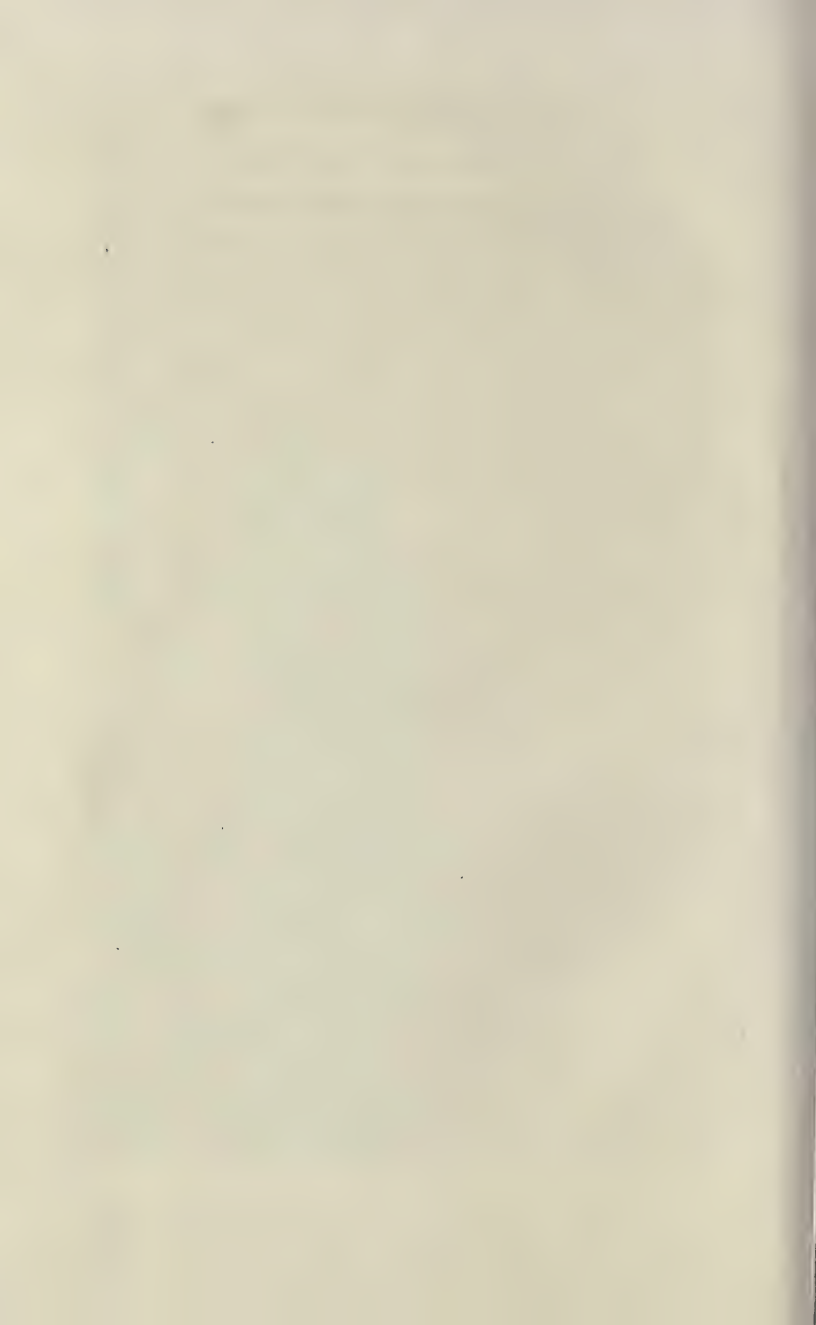
The weak or dull or silly or confused plays, or parts of plays, which put so severe a strain on the patience and reverence of Shakespeare's readers, are probably the work of third-rate men whose hemp has become entangled with Shakespeare's silk. At the beginning of his literary career he seems to have added good work to others' bad ; at the end, others seem to have added bad work to Shakespeare's good.

It has been suggested that the downright badness of some of the earlier plays is explained by the fact that Shakespeare was learning his trade as a writer and that he necessarily bungled. No doubt he made long strides of technical improvement, and there is as wide a stretch between Shakespeare the beginner and Shakespeare the mature dramatic poet, as there is between Shakespeare in mid-career and Shakespeare's astonishing fore-runner, Christopher Marlowe. But at no stage was Shakespeare bungler enough to perpetrate the worst things which bear his name. In proof of this it is enough to point to his two small books of poetry, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, published as early as 1593 and 1594. These poems have been blamed on many grounds: but no one worth listening to has ever said that they are the fumbings of a beginner.

Both *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* versify passionate and tragical stories. But Shakespeare's treatment is remote, decorative, cold. Hazlitt, numbed by this coldness, has compared the two poems with two ice-houses. It would be more just to say that they are like



QUEEN ELIZABETH AT THE GLOBE THEATRE WITNESSING "THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR."
(After David Scott.)



two cold stone temples, consecrated the one to Profane and the other to Sacred Love, and that their two legends, the legend of baulked passion and the legend of outraged chastity, are figured there with all the rich colouring of church windows—and with all the glassy chilliness as well. But the point to note is that, from first to last, they are finished with the masterly craft of an accomplished poet.

Venus and Adonis was dedicated to the Earl of Southampton; and, from the patronage of an earl, the poet went quickly on to enjoy the favour of the highest in the land. As an actor he appeared before the Queen at the palace of Greenwich, and, as a poet, it is known that he wrote *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to please Elizabeth who had expressed a wish “to see Falstaff in love.” Shakespeare seems to have been in equally good odour with James the First; for the Puritan reaction against the theatre had still to make itself strongly felt. Nor was his popularity with nobles and monarchs an empty honour. It is said that the Earl of Southampton gave him £1000 “to enable him to go through with a purchase which he had a

mind to " ; and the dedication of the First Folio shows that the earls of Pembroke and of Montgomery had also given solid proofs of their enthusiasm. Indeed, Mr. Sidney Lee has calculated that, after 1599, Shakespeare's income was equal to £5000 a year of our money. It is probable that he hastened to the relief of his father, whose fortunes had sadly declined. For a time he visited Stratford only once a year ; but, having bought New Palace, the best house in the town, he spent his last days almost entirely on his estates and supplied the stage with two plays every year.

Of his intimate life in London nearly all the hints that remain are will-o'-the-wisps. The beautiful youth and the dark woman who move through the sonnets are believed by some readers to have been mere literary pegs on which to hang verses, while others more reasonably maintain that they were of solid flesh and red blood and that they helped to deepen in Shakespeare's soul the gloom which broods over *King Lear* and his greater tragedies. Into the depths of blank pessimism and atheism Shakespeare never descends : but to contrast his early tragedy

Romeo and Juliet with *King Lear* is to obtain an awful glimpse of his march into the dark.

But the end was peaceful and golden, like a sunset. Once he had shaken London's dust from his feet and settled down among sweet fields and green forests, Shakespeare's spirit emerged from the dark valley at the upper end. For a long time it was the custom of editors to divide his works into Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies : but modern criticism is happily preferring a fourfold division and is placing the kindly works of Shakespeare's last period in the category of Romances. The Romances include such works as *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* : and perhaps it is because he wrote them with his daughters at his side that they are abrim with a tender reverence for young love.

Shakespeare died in 1616. Some say his death was due to bad drains, and others that it followed upon a bout of drinking : but, although he was only fifty-two years old, his work was done.

The gold which remains when one has purged the dross from his achievement is so abundant

and so resplendent that it takes away one's breath. Laughter and tears, love and hate, day and night, summer and winter, kings and clowns, town and country, peace and war—with these and with all other great opposites he is at home, and his unwearied spirit has ranged over all the tracts between.

It is Shakespeare who wrote, almost casually, of "the dark backward and abysm of time"; and yet the same Shakespeare could be so direct and simple that, at the climax of their tragedy, he is content to let Iras speak to Cleopatra in words of one syllable, saying :—

. . . The bright day is done,
And we are for the dark.

Shakespeare held the mirror—his magic mirror—up to nature in a sense of which the modern realist does not dream. Shakespeare is true to life: but so searchingly and poetically true that he gives us life as life would be if life were true to itself. In the world which he discovers women laugh more brightly and weep more softly while men love more grandly and hate more vilely than in the anæmic world of every-day fact. At Shakespeare's call, kings wax into kings indeed; and



THE DEATH OF JULIUS CÆSAR.
After J. Gérôme.

even the arch-king, the king of terrors, Death, awes and hushes us more solemnly because, though it be unconsciously, we look with Shakespeare's eyes at his sable mantle and moon-red crown.

JOHN MILTON

"**T**HY soul," cried Wordsworth, invoking Milton, "was like a star and dwelt apart."

The words are true in a sense other than Wordsworth's own. Shakespeare fires us like the sun : Spenser beams upon us like the moon : but Milton's pure cold ray seems to reach us from outside our solar system, through gulfs immeasurable and void.

It must be admitted that this chilliness of Milton is not generally recognized and that there are many people by whom it would be hotly denied. Interpreting him as they do by those stirring utterances on Liberty which made Wordsworth exclaim

Milton ! Thou shouldst be living at this hour.
England hath need of thee,

his admirers take it for granted that Milton's blood raced in and out of a warm and generous

heart. Again, recalling his justly famous dogma that poetry should be "simple, sensuous, passionate," they assume that the dogmatist himself was a simple, sensuous, passionate, elemental child of nature. The harsh truth is that in his championship of Liberty, Milton was an opportunist pleading for himself and his party ; and that the simplicity, sensuousness, and passionateness of his poetry are nearly all due to the fine taste and self-conscious effort of a fastidious and industrious scholar who, although he was certainly not the greatest of English poets, was probably the greatest of English men of letters.

John Milton's father was a scrivener and a precisian—lean and shivery words both. But he was of sound yeoman stock : and, in spite of his Puritanism, he showed a taste in music which re-appears in the long-drawn melodies and organ-like harmonies of his son's greater poems. For Milton's father was better than a musical dabbler. A composition of his was deemed worthy of a place in *The Teares and Lamentations of a Sorrowful Soule*, along with numbers by such men as Orlando Gibbons and

John Bull, and even William Byrd. Indeed, only a few weeks before the publication of the present volume, a London music-publisher has found it worth while to reprint, on its musical merits, a madrigal which the father of Milton contributed to *The Triumphs of Oriana*, in praise of Queen Elizabeth.

The boy John was born on 9th December, 1608, at the Spread Eagle in Bread Street. In modern England such picturesque signs and bravely-sounding names as the Spread Eagle and the Golden Lion and the Black Horse have been left almost entirely to inns and drinking-bars: but, under James the First, the name simply meant that the scriptorium of Milton's father was reckoned as a shop. In this case there was nothing in a name. The spread-eagle spirit was alien to the yea-and-nay Puritan household over whose door the imperious bird extended his gilded wings.

From grammar schools and private masters the lad passed on to a Nonconformist school in Essex, where his dignity as a budding bard was so little understood that the matron cut his poet's locks as short as a convict's. At the

age of twelve he found himself at St. Paul's School under a headmaster who, although he "had his whipping fits," managed to push and coax his pupil a long way up the steep slope of classical learning. Milton himself declared in after life that he scarcely ever went from his lessons to his bed before midnight.

Oddly enough, the youth's earliest poetical exercise is still his most widely known. For every person in the world who reads poetry as such, there are fifty honest, illiterate persons who treasure the mixed contents of their hymn-books on non-poetical grounds. There are thousands of places in the English-speaking world where no one could be found to recite a pair of lines from *Lycidas* or *Comus*: but there is hardly a hamlet where somebody does not know the hymn

Let us, with a gladsome mind,
Praise the Lord, for He is kind.

At the time of his paraphrasing this and another psalm Milton was only fifteen years old: but there are couplets in his version which clearly

promise the fine and strong achievement of his manhood. For examples :—

Let us blaze His name abroad,
For of Gods He is the God.

Who by His wisdom did create
The painted heavens so full of state.

* * * * *

And large-limb'd Og He did subdue
With all his over-hardy crew.

At seventeen, Milton proceeded to Christ's College, Cambridge—the university of Dryden and Gray, of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of Byron and Tennyson. In 1625 Cambridge had hardly begun to differentiate herself from Oxford, and her atmosphere was as classical as her sister's. But the new undergraduate, who had acquired Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, and Italian before leaving home, sniffed at the hoary seat of learning disrespectfully. He came into conflict with his tutor, and is even said to have been flogged as well as sentenced to a short term of rustication. Nevertheless, he contrived to endure the prescribed seven years of residence. His contemporaries called him "Lady," because

of his good books and still better behaviour. But all efforts to woo him into the ministry of the Church failed. "He who would take orders," he said, "must subscribe slave."

Horton, a typically English village in Buckinghamshire, had meanwhile become the family home on the retirement of Milton's father from business. It was a place of lush meadows and grand trees and abundant waters, with a glimpse of Windsor Castle to add the necessary touches of humanity and of art. Here, after he had done with Cambridge, the young scholar abode for five years. At first he was well content and confessed that he could

call to witness the groves and rivers and the beloved village elms under which, in the last past summer, I remember having had supreme delight with the Muses, when I too, among rural scenes and remote forests, seemed as if I could have grown and vegetated through a hidden eternity.

Five years later, however, he exclaimed, "Where I am now I live obscurely and in a cramped manner." He was weary of the fields and felt that he had accomplished little. Yet these cramped and obscure years gave birth to

nearly all the poems by which Milton will stand shoulder to shoulder with Keats in the meagre ranks of the immortal English poets. Not until twenty years later did he begin *Paradise Lost*: but it is not upon *Paradise Lost* that Milton's fame will ultimately stand. *Paradise Lost* is an astonishingly sustained pageant of verse, just as the almost contemporary *Pilgrim's Progress* is a wonderful procession of prose. But both these Puritan classics have been made to bulk up out of the true picture of English literature because, for a very long time, they were the principal poetical and imaginative reading of millions of excellent people whose consciences did not allow them to feast upon literature for literature's sake.

By 1637, the year of his disenchantment with Horton, Milton had written the *Ode on the Morning of the Nativity* (1629), *L'Allegro*, and *Il Penseroso* (1633), *Comus* (1634), and *Lycidas* (1637). The Authorized Version of the Bible was already twenty-five years old, and Milton accordingly has the advantage of being the first English poet who can speak to the modern Englishman in a tongue which does not call for

a glossary. The few archaisms which survive in his work help its effect by their lucid quaintness, as in these two fine endings of stanzas in the Nativity ode :—

. . . the mild oceán,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

* * * * *

And all about the courtly stable
Bright-harness'd angels sit in order serviceable.

In the following lines of *Il Penseroso*, Milton touched the high-water mark of reflective, decorative English poetry :—

But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloisters pale,
And love the high embowéd roof
With antic pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight
Casting a dim, religious light.
There let the pealing organ blow
To the full-voiced quire below,
In service high and anthem clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all heaven before mine eyes.

Comus was written to be performed as a masque on Michaelmas night, 1634, at Ludlow Castle :

for the Roundheads had not yet seized power and banned theatrical entertainments. The splendid *Lycidas*, composed in 1637, was one of thirty-six elegies, most of them extremely bad, in which thirty-six poets bewailed the death of one Edward King who had been drowned on the way to Ireland.

In the spring of 1638, Milton sailed for Italy, going to Rome by way of Paris, Nice, Genoa, Leghorn, and Pisa. The Italians could not read his English poems: but they were not blind to the great merits of his Latin verses, and Milton has himself preserved the memory of a magnificent concert given by Cardinal Barberini,

who himself waiting at the doors and seeking me out in so great a crowd, nay, almost laying hold of me by the hand, admitted me within in a truly most honourable manner.

In Florence, Milton met Galileo, already blind, and unconsciously stored up a lesson of resignation against the dark day of his own blindness. He also met Manso, the protector of Tasso, and confided to him his plan of an epic poem. In sunny, courtly Italy, Milton intended that his epic should treat of King Arthur: but, as every-

body knows, he altered his mind when he set to work under the dour Commonwealth and wrote "of Man's first disobedience" instead.

The struggle between the King and the Parliament would have stung a warm-blooded poet to break out into his most impassioned verse : but poetical unrest was not congenial to the sumptuous deliberateness of Milton's verse-making. For eighteen years he was almost silent as a poet. It is true that he wrote the very earnest sonnet, beseeching the Royalists to pity a poor Parliament-man, which runs :—

Captain or Colonel or Knight in arms,
Whose chance on these defenceless doors may seize,

* * * * *

Lift not thy spear against the Muses' bower.

But Milton's literary labours, from the finishing of his *Epitaphium Damonis* in 1639 to the beginning of *Paradise Lost* about 1658, were restricted to the educating of his nephews and the writing of pamphlets and State-papers. Instead of giving the world an Arthurian poem, which would have been greater than Tennyson's, he turned loose five ecclesiastical pamphlets, one

of which bore the engaging title *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnus*. Roughly stated, Milton's belief was not in "a free Church in a free State," but in a civic order under which Church and State would be merely two aspects of one body. Like other Puritans he gazed longingly back to the theocracy of the Children of Israel which had ended under the prophet Samuel. The Church was to be the State, the State the Church; and, to realize this ideal the Church was to be purged of bishops, and the State relieved of kings. As for the arguments in these pamphlets of Milton's they were admirably adapted to convince those readers who agreed with him already.

The Civil War broke out in 1642. For sixteen years Milton had been receiving interest on a loan of £500 which he or his father had made to an Oxfordshire squire, Richard Powell. The creditor was a Roundhead, the debtor a Cavalier. It has been suggested that, owing to the war, an instalment of interest became overdue: but this is no more than a guess. The certain fact is that at Whitsuntide, 1643, Milton mounted a horse and rode off through the

hawthorn and the buttercups to his debtor's house.

There is something wrong with any man, be he chimney-sweep or poet, who reaches the age of thirty-five—exactly half his three-score and ten—without having fallen in love. When Milton set out for Oxfordshire, he was in his thirty-fifth year : and, although he had paid a Latin compliment or two in Italy, love seemed to have passed him by. Unhappily marriage does not always mean love : and the amazing marriage of Milton involved love on neither side. Within a month of his departure from town, he was back among his astonished household in Aldersgate Street with a bride—Mary Powell, the daughter of his debtor, a girl of seventeen. The husband, who was almost old enough to be her father, seems to have chilled and repelled the poor child from the outset. Milton's nephew, Phillips, who lived with the pair and knew all about it, says :—

By that time she had for a month or thereabouts led a philosophical life (after having been used to a great house and much company and joviality), her friends, possibly incited by her own desire, made

earnest suit by letters to have her company the remaining part of the summer, which was granted on condition of her return at the time appointed, Michaelmas or thereabouts. Michaelmas being come and no news of his wife's return he sent for her by letter, and receiving no answer sent several other letters which were also unanswered, so that at last he despatched down a foot-messenger : but the messenger came back without an answer. He thought it would be dishonourable ever to receive her again after such a repulse.

Phillips goes on to state that it was this bad faith at Michaelmas which goaded Milton into writing his two tracts on *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. But Masson, the poet's best biographer, has discovered that the true story is more painful still. He has shown that the first of the tracts on divorce was written in July, only a month after the wedding.

To shatter generous illusions is sorry work. But the truth must be told. And the truth is that the bright fountains of Milton's pleas for Liberty are poisoned at their source by opportunism and self-interest. He championed divorce in general because he wished to be rid of Mary Powell in particular. As for his famous *Areopagitica*, the best of all his prose

writings, this eloquent appeal for the Freedom of the Press was evoked by the disfavour with which the Presbyterian censorship looked at its author's own tracts on divorce. In troublous times, when the greater swallows up the less, too much must not be made of the inconsistencies of public men : but, when all due allowances have been made, it remains a blot on Milton's fame that, within seven years of writing his *Areopagitica*, he became himself a paid censor ; and also that, when he was himself profiting by toleration under the restored Stuarts, one of his latest writings was directed against the extension of toleration to a body whose religious tenets he did not approve.

For two years the truant bride remained in Oxfordshire without either side holding out the smallest sprig of olive. Meanwhile Milton's school was enlarged and his old father came to keep the deserted husband company. Apparently the champion of divorce was prepared to practise what he preached : for he began openly courting Miss Davis, "a very witty and handsome gentlewoman." But the guns at Naseby happily blew the witty and handsome gentlewoman's chance

away. King Charles was finally beaten : and, a month or so later, Mary reappeared "making submission and begging pardon on her knees." It is a bright and honourable page in Milton's life which records how he was reconciled with the runaway even to the extent of giving shelter to her family after the fall of Oxford the following year. Oxford surrendered in June ; and in July Milton's eldest daughter was born.

After the beheading of the King, which Milton supported, the poet's progress in worldly prosperity was rapid. At a salary equal to £900 a year of our money, he acted as Latin secretary in Cromwell's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and also as censor of the Press. He enjoyed the use of a suite of rooms in Whitehall Palace. When the immense success of the mysterious book *Eikon Basilike* began to cause a reaction in the dead King's favour, it was Milton who was deputed by the nervous Council of State to write *Eikonoklastes* in answer. Again, when the learned Salmasius denounced the regicides, it was Milton who made the official retort. Unfortunately the retort fell below the dignity of

the occasion. For example, to taunt Salmasius with enduring a shrewish wife was hardly an argument for cutting off the head of a king. But personalities are livelier than logic, and accordingly Milton's pamphlet had an immense popular success.

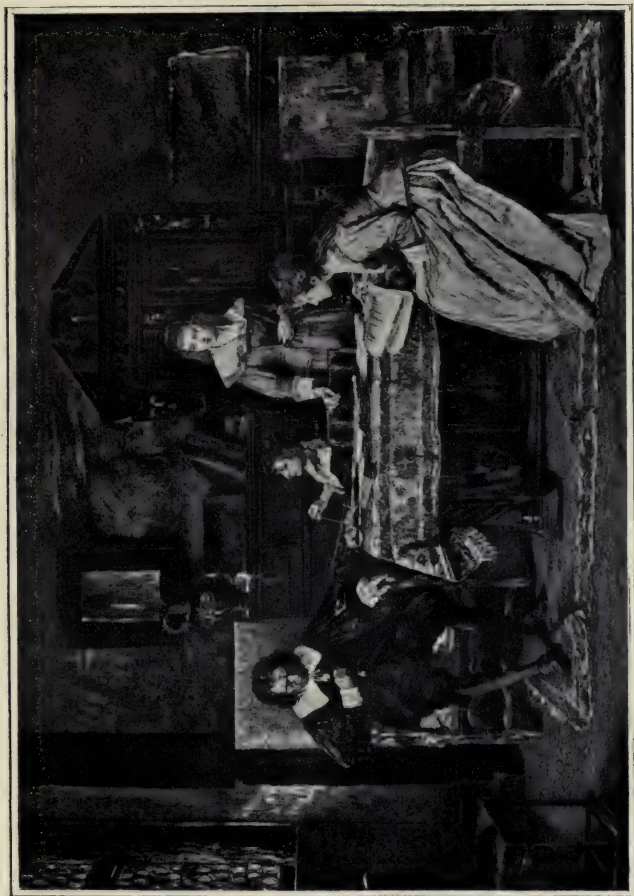
In March, 1652, darkness sealed the poet's eyes. By this time three more children had been born to him : and, in the following May, his wife died. It was out of the depths of these griefs that Milton uttered the noble and beautiful sonnet *On His Blindness*.

With Oliver Cromwell John Milton stood well. Coadjutors were appointed, and he retained his official post. In 1656, he married Katherine Woodcock, "a captain's daughter"; but both Katherine and her babe died in 1658. Two years later came the Restoration, and Milton went into hiding in Bartholomew Close, Smithfield. But the only vengeance pronounced against him was the public burning of his books against Charles the First : and, with a reduced but still ample income, the ex-Secretary to the Commonwealth was able to live out his remaining fourteen years in safety and in comfort.

During the Plague he dwelt at Chalfont St. Giles, where his cottage still stands.

Paradise Lost was begun in 1658 and ended in 1663. For years after dropping the idea of King Arthur the poet had been casting about for a subject and had wavered among ninety-nine themes, of which sixty-one were Scriptural and thirty-eight legendary or historical. He also hesitated between the dramatic and the epic forms before he decided upon a didactic epic "to justify the ways of God to man." The poem was dictated to his younger daughters, who were often aroused in the dead of night to write down the new-made lines.

The relations of Milton with these poor scribes of his own flesh and blood make wretched reading. Despite his tract on Education, the eldest daughter was not taught even to write her name. The others were trained to read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew aloud ; but beyond pronouncing the sounds, they had no suspicion of their meaning. When Milton died, he left his daughters nothing, on the ground that he had done enough for them already. Turning to the other side, it is said that the girls hated their



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MILTON DICTATING "PARADISE LOST" TO HIS DAUGHTERS.

After A. Munkacsy.



father and that they sold off book after book from his library to a rag-wife for pocket-money. It is pleasant to know that Milton's third wife, a golden-haired Cheshire lass, thirty years his junior, whom he had married in 1663, resigned a portion of the estate to her step-daughters after a little pressure: and, also, that Deborah Milton was cared for in her old age by Johnson and Addison and the Princess Caroline, for poetry's sake.

Paradise Lost was sold to Samuel Symmons in 1667 on terms which ensured to the author £5 for each of the first three impressions, an impression counting 1300 copies. Milton himself received £10, and his widow sold her interest for £8. In defence of Samuel Symmons it must be remembered that if a poet of the present day ventured to take to a publisher the MS. of an epic as good, as long, and as serious as *Paradise Lost* he would be shown the door.

Despite its Arian doctrine, and despite the fact that Satan is the real hero of the epic, *Paradise Lost* was passed by the Archbishop's censor, a personage with the unepical name of Thomas Tomkyns, and it began to make its way in the world. As an example of Christian

apologetics, its day has worn to twilight : but, for that very reason, its starry beauties are shining out more brightly. Among poets, there is not one who loves it : but, on the other hand, there is not one who does not respect it, marvel at it, and learn from it. Its music is nearly always as grand as the organ on which the blind poet played ; and, now and again, it is as sweet as the piping of birds. Considered technically, as a prolonged exercise in blank verse, it is one of the wonders of the poets' world. But it is not astir, as such an epic should be, with life—life temporal and life eternal—and it is not aglow with love—love human and love divine. As for *Paradise Regained*, although Wordsworth and Coleridge ranked it above *Paradise Lost*, it is chillier and tamer still. In short, Mark Pattison's verdict on *Paradise Lost* as "the elaborate outcome of all the best words of all antecedent poetry" is a sound verdict, and "elaborate" is a good, a true and a good, word. Yet, in treating of its author, one cannot fairly close upon a grudging note. We may make vast reservations, and yet say of Milton, with Goethe, "He is very great."

JOHN DRYDEN

“**D**RYDEN found English of brick and left it of marble,” said Dr. Johnson. The saying has been laughed at on the ground that the bricks included *Hamlet* and *Othello*—monuments beside which the costliest of Dryden’s marbles are of no more worth than a heap of cracked pots. Nevertheless Johnson spoke the truth. English as Dryden found it was not the English of Shakespeare: for the Puritan epoch had intervened, and Shakespeare’s natural influence upon literature had been largely thwarted. It was not even the English of Milton; for the warm and licentious Restoration had swamped the chilly decorum of the Commonwealth. Besides, when Dryden emerged as a full-fledged poet, *Paradise Lost* lay still unpublished and Milton’s known poems did not overflow one slender volume. The English which held the field was, in the main, brick

indeed—rudely-shaped, half-baked clay, of the earth earthy. It is the glory of Dryden that he gripped our literary language when it was on the headlong road to degeneration and restored its form and comeliness and self-respect. Under Pope, Dryden's great disciple, it is true that poetry became so marble-stiff and marble-cold that it had to be snatched out of the flawless and crystal-clear and shining but death-dealing ice by the eager hands of Chatterton and Blake and Coleridge and the Romantics. But the fact abides that Dryden saved our poetry and directed its course for a hundred years. We may be sorry that he and his successors sent the bright stream along channels as formal as Dutch canals : but, without Dryden's embankments, the flood would probably have leaked and oozed and spread over an evil swamp, and the century after Milton, like the century after Chaucer, would have been barren of poetry and fertile only in the rude songs and ballads of mere versifiers.

Dryden was born at the vicarage of Aldwinkle All Saints, in Northamptonshire, on 9th August, 1631. His native house still stands : and from Aldwinkle village one can still look at a grand

cedar which was planted two years before the poet was born. The slow and fishful Nene, in which Dryden learned a love of angling which he never lost, flows through the wooded vale. Near at hand stood the mound of Fotheringhay : but Dryden never mentions either the castle or Mary Stuart in his poems, although he became poet-laureate to a Stuart King and died in dogged disapproval of William and Mary.

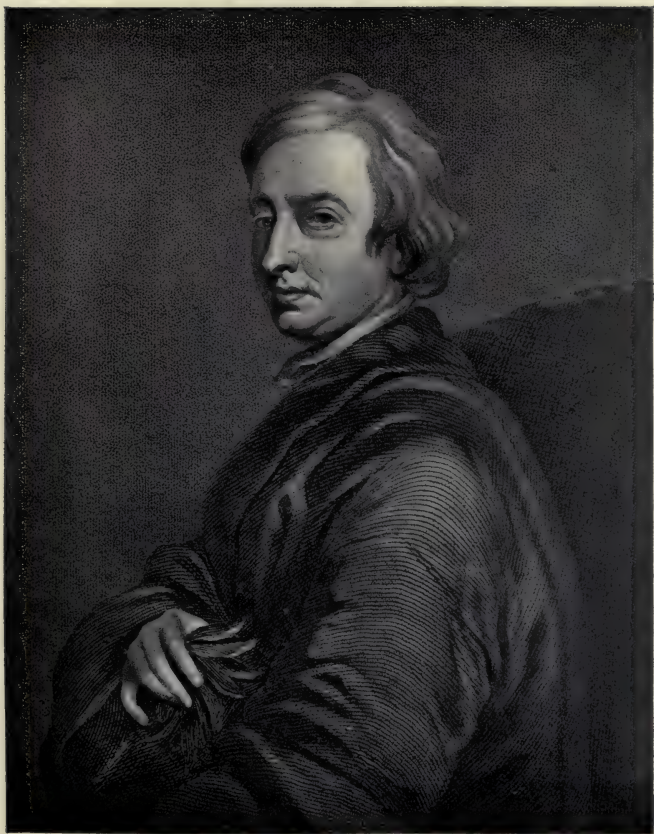
Westminster School and Cambridge gave Dryden the education which he was to put to good account in his great version of the whole work of Virgil. But, like Milton, he failed to love Cambridge, as appears from the lines :—

Oxford to him a dearer name shall be
Than his own mother university ;
Thebes did his green unknowing youth engage,
He chooses Athens in his riper age.

At Canons Ashby, in a delicious house which still belongs to the family, dwelt Honor Driden, daughter of Sir John Driden, the poet's uncle. To this cousin Honor—who never married— young John Dryden addressed an ardent and gallant epistle which is still in existence. It has been assumed that here was a tragedy of hopeless

love on both sides, with the greedy and heartless Sir John in the rôle of the stern parent. The supposed suitor was already about twenty-four years old, and the fortune which had just fallen to him on the death of his father brought in an income of no more than £200 at the present value of money. Again, Sir John was a thorough-going Parliamentarian, while his nephew, despite his Puritan parentage and his trimming *Heroic Stanzas* on the death of Cromwell, was probably all along a Royalist at the bottom of his heart. For either, or both, or neither of these reasons : or for some others ; or for none at all ; the ardent and gallant epistle proved to be a mere flash in the pan.

With the baser sort of biographers it seems to have become a principle that every genuine English poet must have been short of money and unhappily married. Certain literary historians of the nineteenth century, led by the partisan Macaulay, have chosen to blacken the picture of Dryden's domestic life, and, on the strength (or weakness) of evidence on which one would not hang a dog, the widely-read John Richard Green has flung broadcast the deplorable statement, "Dryden's life was that of a libertine, and his



JOHN DRYDEN.

After the Portrait engraved by C. E. Wagstaff.

marriage with a woman who was yet more dissolute than himself only gave a new spur to his debaucheries."

Dryden was married, at the end of the year 1663, to Lady Elizabeth Howard, eldest daughter of the Earl of Berkshire. The worst that is known against this "woman more dissolute than himself" is the fact that, before her marriage, she wrote a letter to the Earl of Chesterfield into which it is possible to read hints of a flirtation. After the marriage, she lived with her husband until his death thirty-seven years afterwards. Her three boys were well brought up and became men of religious mind; and an ill-spelt but long and motherly postscript which she added to a letter written by Dryden to his sons breathes of domestic unity and goodwill. As for Dryden himself, the "debaucheries" hardly come up to expectations. The most frightful of them is his eating of tarts with a friend and "with Madam Reeve at the Mulberry Garden." Madam Reeve was a famous actress; the friend appears to have been the manager, Southern; and Dryden himself, the third of the shameless tart-eaters, did practically nothing for fifteen years beyond

writing stage-plays. If one is to brand Dryden as a libertine on such a ground as this, one must call every modern playwright who lunches after a rehearsal with an actor-manager and his leading lady an infamous wastrel unfit for decent society.

It is necessary to go into this matter of Dryden's alleged vileness and dishonour because the defaming of his character has led to the neglect of his verse. The neglect of his plays is less regrettable ; because although they contain fine work, lyrical, dramatical, and purely poetical, they are defiled by the coarseness with which the Restoration playwrights, however estimable their private characters, thought it necessary to strew their writings. But the poetry is too distinguished in itself and too far-reaching in its influence to be passed by. In the course of his long life, Dryden attempted almost all the known forms of poetical composition, and in none of them did he fail. And he is hardly ever tiresome. Too many of the great poets, like Wordsworth in the *Prelude*, have been great bores. But Dryden has as many points as couplets. His under-rated *Æneid* is easier to read through than *The Faërie Queen* or *Paradise Lost*.

Astræa Redux, the poem in which Dryden hailed the returning Stuarts, was written in 1660. In 1667 came *Annus Mirabilis*, written not in couplets but in quatrains. Here are some of the verses describing the small beginning of the Great Fire :—

Then in some close-pent room it crept along
And, smouldering as it went, in silence fed :
Till the infant monster, with devouring strong,
Walked boldly upright with exalted head.
Now, like some rich and mighty murderer,
Too great for prison which he breaks with gold,
Who fresher for new mischief doth appear
And dares the world to tax him with the old,
So 'scapes the insulting fire his narrow jail.

The words “in silence fed” were surely written by a poet of more than academical interest. But, after completing *Annus Mirabilis*, Dryden deserted poetry for the theatre and did not return to it until he was fifty years old. The theatre brought him both bitters and sweets. There were the inevitable quarrels with actors and rivals : his works were parodied ; and one of the duels of satire ended in Dryden's being most unjustifiably beaten in a dark alley by the hired ruffians of a rake and a coward. On the other

hand he lived comfortably in the house in Gerrard Street, Soho, which may still be traced by an inscribed medallion ; he was made Poet-laureate and Historiographer-royal with a salary of £200 a year and a butt of sack ; and his annual income rose to as much as £3000 of to-day's money.

Absalom and Achitophel, the satire with which, in 1681, Dryden came out of the theatre, is remarkable in more ways than one. The amazing technical cleverness of its couplets gave to the satirists of the eighteenth century their ideal form : while the cool spirit of the work is as far from the superheated spirit of the bullying and swashbuckling satires of Dryden's predecessors as the Poles are from the Equator. Again, the poems show that its author was not a mere literary man, but that he could take up poetry like a trumpet and blow forth battlecries and oracles on the living questions of the hour. *Absalom* and *Achitophel* dealt with the Popish Plot : and its successors, *The Medal*, *MacFlecknoe*, and *Religio Laici*, all traversed the highways and by-ways of the same burning business.

The satires hugely enlarged Dryden's fame :

but his income began to dwindle. Disputes with the players had cut off the profits of play-writing, and the Treasury was £1000 in arrears with his salary as Poet-laureate. By way of solatium, Dryden was appointed to a Collectorship of Customs—an office which Chaucer had filled three hundred years before—but the meridian of his prosperity had been passed.

The Hind and the Panther, Dryden's next considerable poem, was the first-fruits of his conversion to Roman Catholicism. The poet's detractors have found in his change of faith nothing better than contemptible hypocrisy and time-serving. Forgetting the fact that the overwhelming majority of Englishmen did the same, his judges bring it up against him that he had already turned his coat once when he deserted the Puritans to welcome Charles the Second in 1660. Dryden's sincerity in surrendering to the claims of the ancient religion is best tested by the sacrifices he made for his principles. Through refusing to retrace his ecclesiastical steps and to take the oaths to William and Mary he lost all his emoluments and offices under the Crown. He drank down to the dregs of a deep

and bitter cup when he saw the laureateship pass to Shadwell, a wretched creature who was the first to set afloat the scurrilities about Dryden which linger to this day, and so mean a poet that, as early as 1682, Dryden had written :—

The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.

Further, two of his sons were prevented by their change of religion from availing themselves of scholarships which they had gained at the Universities. Nor was Dryden's steadfastness short-lived. Eleven years after the Revolution and only a year before his death he wrote to a friend :—

The Court rather speaks kindly of me than does anything for me, though they promise largely; and perhaps they think I will advance as they go backward, in which they will be much deceived; for I can never go an inch beyond my conscience and my honour. If they will consider me as a man who has done my best to improve the language, and especially the poetry, and will be content with my acquiescence under the present government and forbearing satire on it, that I can promise, because I can perform it: but I can neither take the oaths nor forsake my religion.

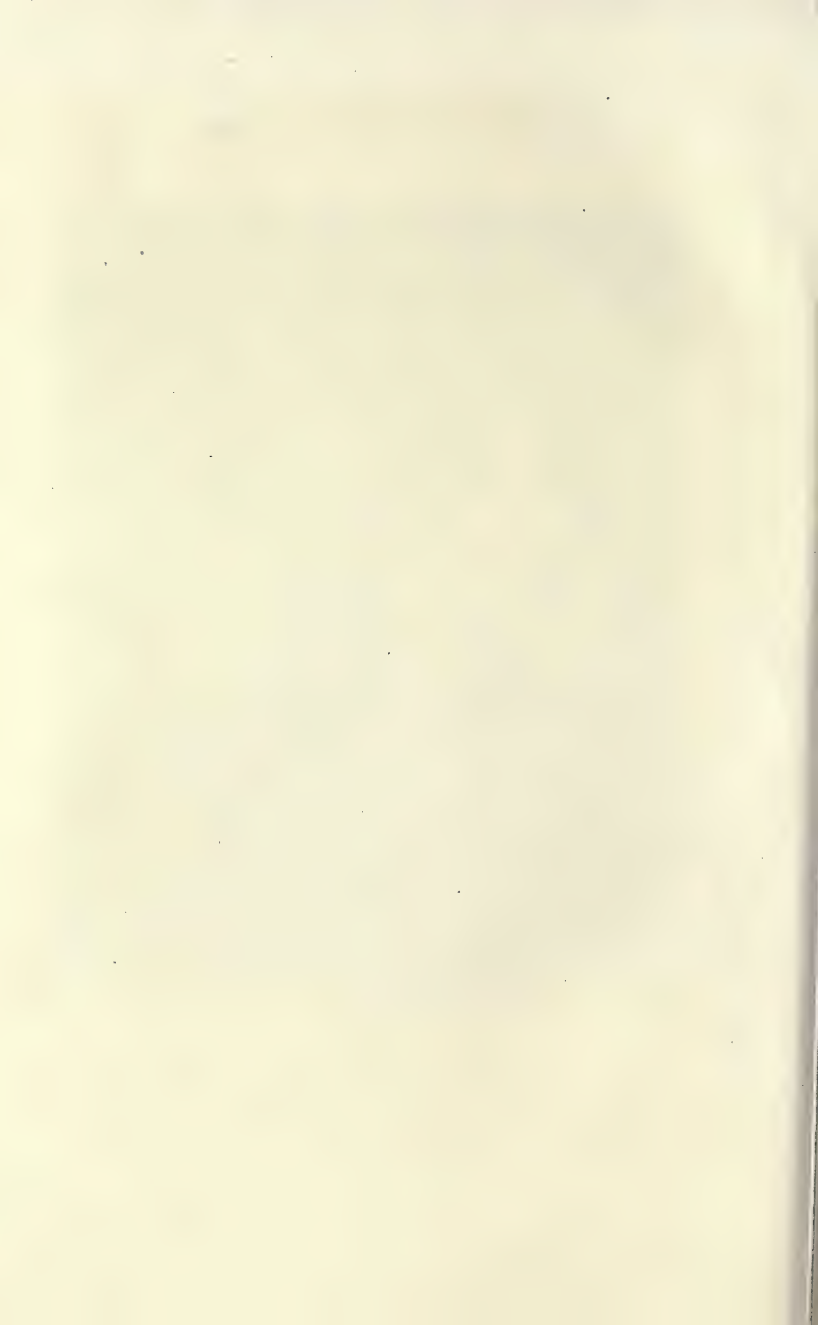
“Forbearing satire,” Dryden was forced to write hard for a living in other forms of verse. If it



“THE REJECTED POET.”

(POPE AND “WORTLEY.”)

(After W. B. Frith, R.A.)



were true that he had lived a dissolute life, the miracle of his last decade would become almost incredible. Losing nearly all his income when he was close upon sixty years old, Dryden set to work and produced in ten years more verses than Gray and Coleridge and Keats, added together, produced in their whole lives. Nor was the verse slovenly or dull. It included the really fine plays, *Don Sebastian* and *Amphitryon*; the opera *King Arthur*, which Purcell set to music; translations of the whole of Persius, the whole of Virgil, a great deal of Ovid and Juvenal, and some of Homer, Horace, Theocritus, and Lucretius; the *Fables*, containing versions of Chaucer and Boccaccio: *Alexander's Feast*; and the *Epistle to John Dryden*. The *Fables* and translations do not amount to less than forty thousand lines, and are thus equal in quantity to the whole extant work of Homer. As for their quality, it may be tasted in the following version of an ode of Horace (the twenty-ninth in the third book). Dryden's translation begins:—

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
He who can call to-day his own;
He who, secure within, can say,
To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived to-day;

Be fair, or foul, or rain, or shine,
 The joys I have possessed, in spite of fate, are mine ;
 Not heaven itself upon the past has power,
 But what has been has been, and I have had my hour.

It ends with the famous contemning of the Sea of Fortune whose gales are so terrifying to those with ill-gotten gains to lose :—

For me, secure from fortune's blows,
 Secure of what I cannot lose.
 In my small pinnace I can sail,
 Contemning all the blustering roar ;
 And running with a merry gale,
 With friendly stars my safety seek
 Within some little winding creek
 And see the storm ashore.

Of *Theodore and Honoria*, from Boccaccio, it may be soberly said that it is incomparably finer than the fine original.

Dryden's last strenuous years are the more amazing by reason of his ill-health and worries. He had to keep nagging at Tonson, his publisher, on money matters. For example, Tonson had changed some money for Lady Elizabeth, and "besides the clipped money there were at least forty shillings brass." Again, "If you have any silver which will go, my wife will be glad of it." Again, "All of your trade are sharpers, and you

not more than others." All the same, the Virgil brought in £1200 : and £500 came from the Earl of Abingdon in payment for an elegy on his dead Countess. But no one ought to grudge these handsome sums to John Dryden, who, in his kindness of heart, never once raised the rents of his tenants during the forty-six years of his land-owning, although rents all over the country were going up by leaps and bounds. He died on 30th April, 1700, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Dryden's prose lies outside the scope of this book. But its clearness and swiftness are seen in the following words on Shakespeare :—

He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously but luckily : when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation : he was naturally learned : he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature : he looked inwards and found her there.

It must be remembered that this praise of Shakespeare was uttered in 1665, when Shake-

speare needed praising after Puritan coldness and amid Restoration rudeness. In the same way, Dryden has need of praise to-day. Even a critic so habitually sound as Minto has hinted that if Pope had not become interested in Dryden on personal grounds, Dryden's reputation would not have endured. But Dryden's vindication stands in his work: and whoever will read it must agree that his own modest boast was true, and that this "man who did his best to improve the language, and especially the poetry" of the Anglo-Saxon race was not only a great craftsman and a great critic but a great poet as well.

ALEXANDER POPE

POPE is the happy exception to the rule that poets are born not made. Just as patient Carthusian monks have been known to labour at a burnt and stony hillside until it yields brighter and larger fruits than any in the orchards and gardens of the fat plain ; so Pope forced from the scanty and flinty patch of his meagre poetical endowment a crop so fine and so abundant as to put many a more richly-gifted but more indolent poet to shame. Pope, indeed, is the one self-made poet among the first-rate reputations. He is the man with one talent who made much out of little, and is the opposite of the born-poet Coleridge, who made little out of much.

Pope, says Dr. Johnson,

was from his birth of a constitution tender and delicate, but is said to have shown remarkable gentleness and sweetness of disposition. The weakness of his body continued through his life ; but the mildness of his mind perhaps ended with his childhood.

So, too, undoubtedly ended any serious education, though in this matter his parents must not be too severely blamed. For as devout Roman Catholics, living under the Penal Laws, they were restricted and driven in upon themselves to a degree which it is almost impossible fully to realize in the present day.

Alexander Pope, born in Lombard Street, in the city of London, on 21st May, 1688, where his father was a linen draper, received merely desultory instruction, from various priests, in Latin and Greek, and a few snatches of schooling until the age of twelve, when any further education among children of his own age was finally put an end to by his father's retiring from business and settling at Binfield, in Berkshire. Here the "little nightingale," as his elderly and doting parents had dubbed him on account of his sweet voice, was set free to flit and peck and sing in whatever woods of romance or learning tempted his roving fancy.

Poetry, with its ardours and its laurels, was his one great ambition, and he confessed that it was his only business and idleness his only pleasure. Indeed, one of his kinsmen considered "it

was the perpetual application he fell into in his twelfth year, that changed his form and ruined his constitution." But it seems more probable that the headaches and crooked figure which afflicted him throughout that "long disease his life" were inherited rather than acquired.

There is a pretty tale of the boy getting some one to smuggle him into the famous Wills' Coffee House that he might see the great Dryden — in his coffee-cups, so to speak. Whether the story be true or not the young and as yet unformed poet worshipped Dryden as an idol, took him for his master, and declared that he had learned versification wholly from his works.

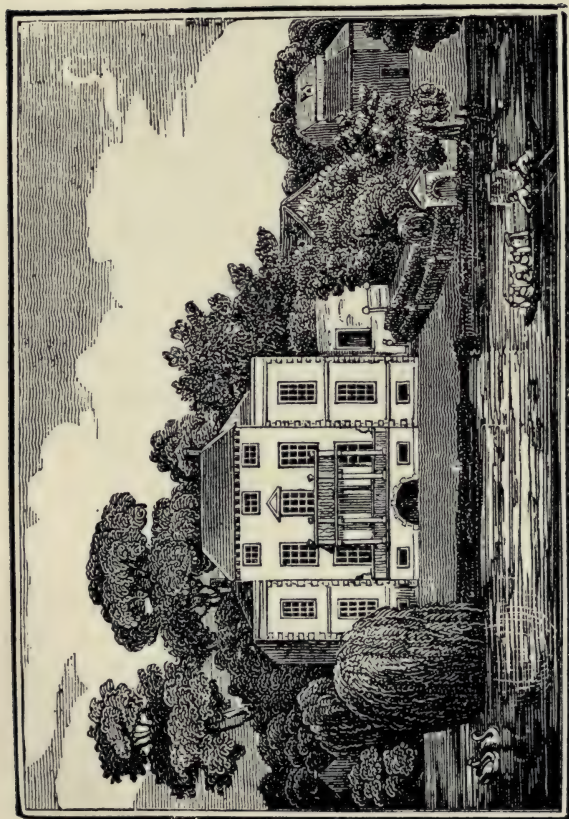
The lad made literary friends in Berkshire. Sir William Trumbull put him in touch with the French literary criticism of the day, and suggested both the poem of *Windsor Forest* and the translation of Homer. Another friend, Englefield, served him more questionably by introducing him to Wycherley and Harry Cromwell, two hoary sinners who had outlived their brother wits and fops of the Restoration. The friendship hardly tended to elevate the already

worldly and cynical mind of the precocious youth who was yearning to be done with Binfield and to blossom out as a man about town.

Wycherley showed Pope's verses to Walsh, then of great renown as a critic, who was astonished at their quality. Thus, before he was seventeen, Pope had been admitted to the intimacy of wits and men of fashion, was forming friendships with such notables as Swift, Steele, and Addison, and had the delight of seeing his verses discussed and handled and admired by most of the leading literary men of his day.

The first of his productions to appear in print was his *Pastorals* in 1709, when Pope was twenty-one. His *Essay on Criticism* followed two years later, and *Windsor Forest* was finished and published in March, 1713.

The poetry of the eighteenth century as we get it in Pope's *Pastorals* is as pompous and artificial as a Versailles gallery, set with gilded chairs. It has no genuine touch with nature. Its breezes are "soft gales," its green grass, "verdant lawns," and the inhabitants of its pretty world of patch and powder are shepherds, love-sick swains, Floras, Phillidas, Silvias, and



POPE'S VILLA AT TWICKENHAM.

(THE ARCH IN THE CENTRE WAS THE ENTRANCE TO THE GROTTO.)

From an old Print.



nymphs and fauns. It is the same spirit of affectation which reared the Trianon and set the court at Versailles masquerading with picture hats and be-ribboned crooks. Yet such poetry can have its emotion and its charm for all sympathetic readers, though being, as it is, founded on a sham it can never rank with the most beautiful and true in the genuine outbursts of the lyrical poets. This quotation from the *Pastorals* shows Pope tuning his artificial pipe with the prettiest grace, so that the four words "not showers to larks," like clear bells, seem to call up all the blue-and-white sweetness of an April morning.

Go, gentle gales, and bear my sighs along !
The birds shall cease to tune their evening song,
The winds to breathe, the waving woods to move,
And streams to murmur ere I cease to love.
Not bubbling fountains to the thirsty swain,
Not balmy sweets to lab'ers faint with pain,
Not showers to larks, not sunshine to the bee,
Are half so charming as thy sight to me.

Pope's generally acknowledged masterpiece is *The Rape of the Lock*, first published in 1712, and republished, as we now have it, in 1714. Lord Petre had stolen a curl from the pretty

head of Miss Fermor. The young woman took great umbrage at what she considered an affront, and there was unpleasantness between the two families. Pope's friend, Caryll, suggested to the poet that it would make a good subject for a mock-heroic poem, which by turning the affair into pleasant ridicule might afford a means of reconciliation between these eighteenth-century Montagues and Capulets. This is how Pope describes the peer's fateful act of severing the lock from Belinda's head, and the terrible moments which followed the deed :—

The peer now spreads the glittering forfex wide,
T' inclose the lock ; now joins it to divide.
E'en then, before the fatal engine clos'd,
A wretched sylph too fondly interpos'd ;
Fate urg'd the shears, and cut the sylph in twain,
(But airy substance soon unites again).
The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever !
Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes,
And screams of horror rent th' affrighted skies.
Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast,
When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last ;
Or when rich China vessels, fall'n from high,
In glittering dust and painted fragments lie !

But this mock-heroic poem was only the prelude to a serio-heroic one which was to make

Pope's fame and fortune. The translation of Homer's *Iliad*, by subscription, was undertaken between the years 1715-20; a translation of the *Odyssey*, less successful, because it was "farmed out" to inferior hands, appeared in 1725 and the following years. From the two ventures Pope received profits amounting to nearly £9000—a larger sum than had ever been, or probably ever will be again, received in such circumstances by an English poet.

By this time, Pope's father was dead. With his new-made fortune Pope bought the villa at Twickenham, whither he removed with his widowed mother. Here, save for occasional visits, Pope spent the remainder of his days, amongst lovely scenery and congenial friendships.

Pope's relations with the three women associated with his name, like his literary quarrels, are full of mystification—a mystification which Pope loved to create about himself, and which he most freely indulged by tampering with his earlier correspondence in later life, as it suited his own ends, and by straying sometimes from the path of truth in his accounts of his family and of his early literary productions.

His sincerest affection seems to have been expended upon the brilliant and fascinating Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. With this sprightly lady he maintained a correspondence after she had left England with her husband for the embassy in Constantinople. When she again settled in England (separated from her husband, but with no open quarrel), she took a house in Twickenham and renewed her acquaintance with the now famous man. The poet wrote her gallant letters, and induced Kneller, the court painter, another of the many famous people attracted to the lovely neighbourhood of Twickenham, to paint her portrait.

Then came a breach. The why and wherefore has been hotly discussed, but there is no reasonable doubt that Lady Mary's account of the affair is correct. She has explained that "at some ill-chosen time, when she least expected what romancers call a declaration, he made such passionate love to her as, in spite of her utmost endeavours to be angry and look grave, provoked an immoderate fit of laughter, from which moment he became her implacable enemy."

That Pope was deeply smitten at this time with Lady Mary is plainly shown by the delicate and feeling poem which he had sent to Gay; but after his rebuff he took his revenge, as always with his enemies, in cruel and often unpardonable and coarse satire, which he never scrupled to put into cold print.

In 1720, Lady Mary wrote from Twickenham to her sister in Paris :—

I see sometimes Mr. Congreve, and very seldom Mr. Pope; who continues to embellish his house at Twickenham. He has made a subterranean grotto, which he has furnished with looking-glasses, *and they tell me*, it has a very good effect. I send you here some verses addressed to Mr. Gay, who wrote him a congratulatory letter on the finishing his house. I stifled them here; and I beg they may die the same death at Paris, and never go further than your closet.

Oh, Friend, 'tis true—this truth you lovers know;
In vain my structures rise, my gardens grow;
In vain fair Thames reflects the double scenes
Of hanging mountains, and of sloping greens;
Joy lives not here, to happier seats it flies,
And only dwells where Wortley casts her eyes.
What are the gay parterre, the chequered shade,
The morning bower, the evening colonnade,
But soft recesses of uneasy minds,
To sigh unheard in to the passing winds?

So the strick deer, in some sequester'd part,
Lies down to die, the arrow at his heart ;
He, stretch'd unseen in coverts hid from day,
Bleeds drop by drop, and pants his life away.

But Lady Mary was not the only flame. Pope's *Epistle of Héloïse to Abélard* is generally supposed to have sprouted at the loss of "Wortley" when she left England for Constantinople, but at the same time he was writing affectionate letters to Theresa and Martha Blount, of Mapledurham.

Why Pope, as a lover in his twenties did not marry Martha Blount does not appear. That he did not ask the hand which she would probably have given him when he was older and fragile and ailing is to his credit. Martha, however, was much with him in later years, and inherited most of the little he had to leave.

The last years of Pope's life were chiefly spent in a campaign of vigorous satire against all his especial enemies, and those whom he and Swift termed the "Dunces." Of *The Dunciad*, Professor Minto has justly said that "apart from personal questions it is the greatest feat of the humorous imagination in English poetry."

In opposition to Pope's spiteful, elfish, merciless, and often venomous moods must be set the

depression and sourness naturally generated by his constant burden of ill-health. It is wonderful how much he accomplished in spite of this terrible handicap. In later years, he could not dress himself without help ; one of his sides was contracted, and he could hardly stand upright till he was laced into a "boddice" made of stiff canvas. But his face was "not displeasing." In fact, he seems to have well merited Wycherley's description when he spoke of Pope's "little, tender, crazy carcass."

Though generally abstemious he is said to have had a great weakness for "a silver saucepan in which it was his delight to eat potted lampreys," and he would always get up to dinner, even on headache-days, if this delicacy were to be on the table. In fact, some of his friends imputed his death, like King John's, to this fish.

But in spite of sickness life seems to have passed away pleasantly enough at Twickenham. The long golden days of summer spent by Pope and his friends strolling over the smooth lawns, supping in the grotto, or basking in the sun and sweet air as the poet's waterman pulled them up

the bright Thames, gay with sailing craft and barges, must have been as great a delight to the wits from the Mall and the coffee-houses, as a punt and a reedy backwater of Father Thames are nowadays to a jaded city man.

At this time, too, George the Second was building Marble Villa (known later to George the Fourth's Mrs. FitzHerbert as Marble Hill) for Mrs. Howard, afterwards Lady Suffolk. Pope, Gay, and Swift lent their taste in the furnishing of the house and the laying out of the grounds, and it is said that Pope was the first to cultivate the weeping willow in England. He found some sticks of it in the wrapping of a parcel sent from Spain to the Countess of Suffolk, and tried them in his own garden. Thus Pope has left a permanent and beautiful memorial to his name in the valley of the Thames, even though his own garden "was hacked and hewed into mere desolation by the next proprietor," and his villa utterly swept away by Lady Howe in 1807.

The charity which in the case of Pope covers a multitude of sins, is the deep affection and constant tenderness which he showed towards his

mother. She lived with him at Twickenham till 1733, and he would never be long absent from her. After her death he placed an obelisk in a secret part of the garden bearing a pathetic inscription. "She died," said Swift, "under the care of the most dutiful son I have ever known or heard of."

Pope lived and died a Papist, but he was not a devotee. When he began to break up at the age of fifty-six, he said to a friend, "I am so certain of the soul's being immortal that I seem to feel it within me, as it were by intuition," and early one morning he rose from bed and tried to begin an essay upon immortality. A devout Roman Catholic who was with him near the end wanted to send for a priest. Pope said, "I do not suppose that it is essential, but it will look right, and I heartily thank you for putting me in mind of it." He received the last sacraments with great fervour and resignation, and passed away on 30th March, 1744, so peacefully that his watching friends, Lord Bolingbroke, Spence, and Martha Blount, could not be sure of the exact moment of death.

Pope's villa was a strong attraction to the in-

quisitive and lion-hunting crowd in his own day.
He says :—

What walls can guard me, or what shades can hide ?
They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide ;
By land, by water, they renew the charge ;
They stop the chariot and they board the barge ;
No place is sacred, not the church is free,
E'en Sunday chimes no Sabbath-day to me.

The villa was still standing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and though a modern residence took its place, the famous grotto, of which Pope was so fond, has been spared. It is a short tunnel, built of flints and shell with two small bays, forming little windowed rooms, where the tunnel emerges to the lawn, and was originally constructed to connect the poet's garden across the road with his other garden which slopes to the river. It had an arrangement of doors and angular bits of looking-glass which converted it in an instant into a camera-obscura, "on the walls of which," says Pope, "all objects of the river, hills, woods, and boats, are forming a moving picture in their visible radiation."

One may still stand in the dimness of this cool "grot" and look down, over the smooth lawn, to the sparkling Thames; or see reflected faintly,

like old dreams, in the perished and clouded pieces of glass, the passing boats, the waving trees, and the blue waters that Pope can never again know.

When Horace Walpole, three years after Pope's death, settled at Strawberry Hill, he wrote, "Pope's ghost is just now skimming under my window by a most poetical moonlight." It is ardently to be hoped that this poor spirit does not revisit, in our own day, the spot once so dear to him. His once charming Twickenham is soiled and noisy, electric cars jangle all day long through its ugly new streets, and the suburban builders have not hesitated to plant their modern villas upon spots where once flourished splendid and famous cedars, or where blossomed the rich gardens of this soft vale—"Twitnam" no longer, for it is London in all but name. A tablet on the wall of the new fantastic villa attests the site only of his old home; some of his riverside garden has been absorbed by neighbouring dwellings; and his vault in the church is indicated by a flat slab, marked with the solitary letter P, and covered with "churchwarden" pews.

So passes the glory of the world, of which perhaps Pope had a little too much in his own lifetime to ensure its untarnished permanency. Yet as long as Father Thames rolls his bright flood to the sea, so long must Pope's name endure. He was one of the first prophets of British Imperialism. For it was Pope as a youth, two hundred years ago, who wrote these words in his *Windsor Forest* :—

The time shall come, when free as seas or wind
Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind,
Whole nations enter with each swelling tide,
And seas but join the regions they divide ;
Earth's distant ends our glory shall behold,
And the new world launch forth to seek the old.

Johnson spoke truly when he said, "Pope's page is a velvet lawn, shaven by the scythe and levelled by the roller." But the excess of trimness in the clearing which he made in the brakes and in the plot which he reclaimed from the marsh must not be over-ridiculed ; for it was from the soil thus prepared that English romantic poetry broke out into sweet, free flower.

THOMAS GRAY

THOMAS GRAY is uplifted into the bright company of the great poets upon the broad slow wings of a single great poem, the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*; though it ought to be noted that the poet himself did not consider the *Elegy* to be the finest of his scanty and fastidious collection.

This immortally beautiful and thoroughly English poem has passed into the language and become subtly interwoven with the sentiments and emotions of every-day life. Immensely admired and imitated all over Europe in Gray's own day, it has exercised an extraordinary influence over the poets in each succeeding generation—those unblessed and often slighted benefactors of the human race, who “far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife,” keep “the noiseless tenour of their way”; the poets who, even more acutely than “the rude forefathers of

the hamlet " (over whom Gray expends his melancholy sensibility in the *Elegy*), have felt that

Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Gray's *Elegy* has the steady, pitiless, magnificent tread of that other great song to Death, composed in the same century, Handel's "Dead March in Saul." They are fraught with the same fascination and fear with which men see the once fair body gathered to the cold earth ; but the robust musician, scorning morbidity, keeps his work throughout in the major key, while the gentle poet can barely tune his soul to a "trembling hope" that has a less lively sense of a sure and certain resurrection than of broken columns, snapped strings, shattered urns, and all the other dreary and godless emblems of the Augustan age. It is only familiarity with the lines that blinds us to the morbidity dwelling in the tender heart of such passages as these in the *Elegy* :—

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

.

Can storied urn or animated bust
 Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
 Can honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
 Or flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death?

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
 The dark unfathomed caves of Ocean bear :
 Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
 This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
 Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
 Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?

Gray's Muse was mounted on no swift-winged Pegasus, he was no purely lyrical poet, born with an unquenchable fountain of living waters in his soul : nevertheless, as Mr. Swinburne has said, "as an elegiac poet Gray holds for all ages to come his unassailable and sovereign station."

The incidents of Gray's life are as meagre as his poetry. Indeed, there is only one which stands out with any great distinction or which helped strongly in the moulding of his character ; and that was the grand tour which he made with Horace Walpole from the years 1739 to 1741.

Gray's extravagant and ill-natured father seems

to have entirely neglected his son, who was born in his house in Cornhill on 26th December, 1716; but his mother's devotion was unbounded, and Gray always evinced for her the warmest affection and gratitude. She saved his life in infancy by opening a vein with a pair of scissors when he had fallen into a fit; and educated him at Eton College at her own expense.

At Eton, Gray became the friend of Horace Walpole, and with the exception of a three years' breach (which began in the last months of their tour and was patched up in 1744) their friendship was warm and lifelong.

In the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, composed the year after his foreign travels, Gray recalls his own and moralizes on boyhood in general. The finest lines of this poem have become as familiar as those of the *Elegy*. For instance :—

Some bold adventurers disdain
The limits of their little reign,
And unknown regions dare descry :

Still as they run they look behind,
They hear a voice in every wind,
And snatch a fearful joy.

And especially :—

Thought would destroy their paradise.

No more ;—where ignorance is bliss,

'Tis folly to be wise.

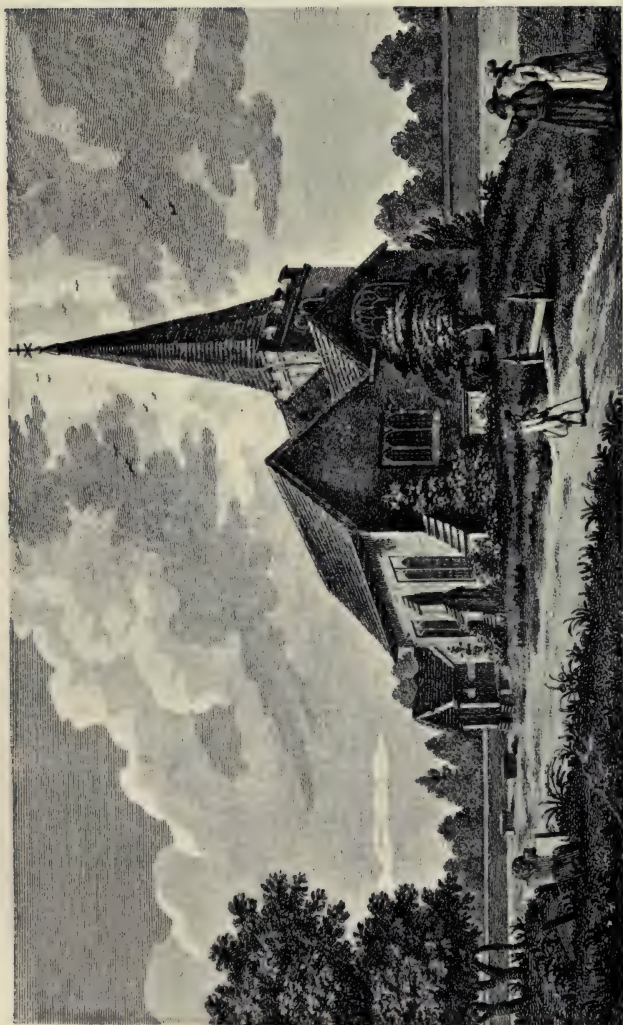
Gray, after leaving Cambridge, had not the means for so expensive a luxury as the grand tour, but Walpole suggested that they should go together, the famous politician's son paying all expenses. Gray, however, was to be regarded as an independent fellow-traveller and not as a secretary or paid companion. It was a happy windfall for a young poet. They left Dover in March, 1739, armed with introductions to the best society of the day in Paris. Here Gray became a man of fashion in silk and ruffles, and waistcoat and breeches so tight that he could scarcely breathe ; and the pair entered upon a round of merriment and sight-seeing, and took excursions to Versailles and Chantilly, "to walk by moonlight, and hear the ladies and the nightingales sing." Gray's letters home are as charming as his letters of thirty years later when he visited the Cumbrian Lakes, and make one wish that, without abandoning poetry, he had also become an essayist like Charles Lamb, to whom he bears

much resemblance in his whimsical, satirical, and graceful prose. In this connection it is interesting to note the remark made, in opposition to the popular estimate of the author of the *Elegy*, by Horace Walpole: "Gray never wrote anything easily but things of humour; humour was his natural and original turn." He seems even to have found it easy to joke at his own melancholy, for he wrote to his friend West after his return to England :—

Low spirits are my true and faithful companions; they get up with me, go to bed with me, make journeys and returns as I do; nay, and pay visits and will even affect to be jocose and force a feeble laugh with me; but most commonly we sit alone together, and are the prettiest insipid company in the world.

Walpole and Gray passed on to Switzerland and Italy. Gray's description of the Grande Chartreuse is remarkable when we remember that the wild sublime scenery of the Alps was considered as undesirable and barbaric in Gray's day as was Gothic architecture. He says :—

In our little journey up to the Grande Chartreuse I do not remember to have gone ten paces without an exclamation that there was no restraining; *not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion*



STOKE POGIS CHURCH.

(AS IT APPEARED ABOUT THE TIME OF GRAY'S COMPOSING HIS "ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD."

From an old Print.

and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument. One need not have a very fantastic imagination to see spirits there at noon-day. You have Death perpetually before your eyes, only so far removed as to compose the mind without frightening it. I am well persuaded St. Bruno was a man of no common genius, to choose such a situation for his retirement; and perhaps I should have been a disciple of his, had I been born in his time.

It was while penetrating the Alps into Italy that Walpole had the grief of seeing his little spaniel Tory snatched from the roadside by a hungry wolf and carried off under his very eyes before one of the gaping servants had wit to draw a pistol. Walpole seems to have been unfortunate in his pets; for eight years later Gray wrote for his friend a poem, which Dr. Johnson rather woodenly called "a trifle, but not a happy trifle," on hearing of his loss of a favourite cat. "The pensive Selima," with "the fair round face, the snowy beard, the velvet of her paws," fell into a china tub containing gold fish and was drowned before any one discovered her plight. Walpole, after Gray's death, placed the china tub on a pedestal at

Strawberry Hill, with a few lines of the poem for its inscription. The letter which accompanied the poem is in Gray's happiest manner : although he quite loses sight of poor pussy's loss of her nine lives in his desire to shine as a graceful humourist.

The year following Gray's return from his foreign travels, considerable changes took place in his family. His father died, and his mother and two of her sisters, in fairly easy circumstances, took a house at Stoke Pogis, in Buckinghamshire. Gray went back to Peterhouse, Cambridge, took his bachelor's degree in Civil Law, and was installed as a resident of that college. He spent the remainder of his life between Cambridge, Stoke, and London, with what he calls "Lilliputian travels" about England and Scotland.

The enlightenment and modernity of Gray's mind on such subjects as architecture and the first stirrings of romantic poetry are remarkable when we reflect how little connection this quiet recluse had with the noisy boisterous life which buzzed around his cell. In a period which could so little understand the enormous genius

of Shakespeare that it could actually discuss him in the same breath as Rowe and Addison, he wrote these words to a friend :—

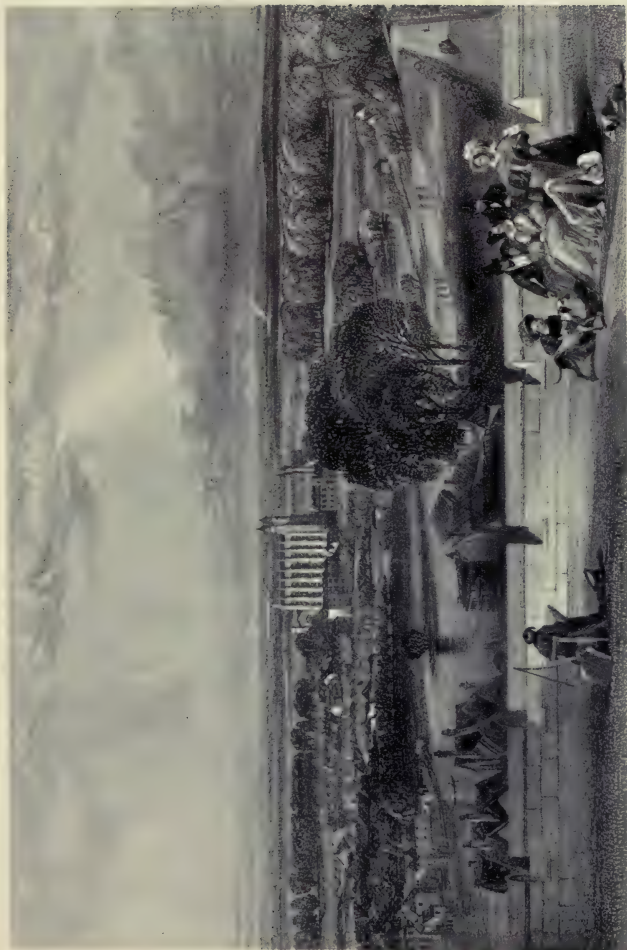
In truth Shakespeare's language is one of his principal beauties ; and he has no less advantage over your Addisons and Rowes in this, than in those other great excellences you mention. Every word in him is a picture.

And while, too, the heavy Georgian taste was still deriding the marvellous flowering of Gothic architecture as barbarous, Gray was writing his *Architectura Gothica*, of which one of his latest biographers has said : "Gray's treatise on Norman architecture is so sound and learned that it is much to be regretted that he has not left us more of his architectural essays. . . . It is not too much to say that Gray was the first modern student of the history of architecture."

The *Elegy* was published in 1751 : in 1756, when in middle-age, Gray passed from Peterhouse to Pembroke College, after having borne, as his friend and first biographer Mason has said, "the insults of two or three young gentlemen of fortune longer than might reasonably have been expected from a man of less warmth

of temper." The last straw had been put on Gray's endurance by a practical joke of the young bucks of Peterhouse, who, like too many men of fashion of the eighteenth century, were so much occupied in prating about "gentlemen" and their "honour" that they had little time to learn anything about either rare commodity. Gray, for many years, had had a great horror of fire. To save himself from being ever burned alive, he had had an iron bar (which still remains in the same spot) fixed within his bedroom window at Peterhouse, and kept a rope-ladder always at hand down which he could descend in case of danger. The more rowdy fellow-commoners placed a tub of cold water under his window one night and raised a false alarm of fire, with very unhappy consequences to the poor poet, who was rescued dripping and shivering in night attire, from the tub, by the delighted barbarians. Gray himself said, "Removing myself from Peterhouse to Pembroke may be looked upon as a sort of era in a life so barren of events as mine."

A year later he declined the laureateship; but in 1768 he accepted the professorship of history



“A DISTANT PROSPECT OF ETON COLLEGE.”

After J. D. Harding.

and modern languages at the University. During his long residences in Cambridge Gray composed the remainder of his most ambitious poems—the *Pindaric Odes*, the *Progress of Poesy*, the *Bard*, his paraphrases of Norse and Celtic lyrics, and the *Installation Ode*—which are more helpful to the student of the development of poetry in England than to the reader who turns to our sweetest singers for the food of angels.

Matthew Arnold has said, "Born in the same year with Milton, Gray would have been another man; born in the same year with Burns, he would have been another man," whereas, "a sort of spiritual east wind was at that time blowing; neither Butler nor Gray could flower. They *never spoke out*." That the instinct of romantic poetry lay buried in him is shown by the following words, written after his return from Scotland in 1765:—

I am returned from Scotland charmed with my expedition; it is of the Highlands I speak; the Lowlands are worth seeing once, but the mountains are ecstatic, and ought to be visited in pilgrimage once a year. None but these monstrous children of God know how to join so much beauty with so much horror. A fig for your poets, painters, gardeners and

clergymen, that have not been among them; their imagination can be made up of nothing but bowling-greens, flowering shrubs, horse-ponds, Fleet-ditches, shell-grottoes, and Chinese rails.

But either from mental inability or physical inertia Gray has not left us more than one great song to gather into the world's treasury. He died from a more than usually severe attack of hereditary gout on 30th July, 1771, at the age of fifty-four, an interesting, admired, warmly-loved, and much-petted man of letters. He had known neither poverty, great sorrow, the cruel buffetings of adverse Fate, nor exuberant happiness, but he adorned his niche with an amiable and lovable personality, and at least one imperishable work of genius.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

IT is strange that the writings of Oliver Goldsmith—an Irishman and a wanderer, whose vagrant days were passed in foreign lands, in wretched attics or in extravagant bachelor chambers—should yield us such a harvest of peaceful home-life ; the mellow golden life of sleepy sun-soaked hamlets and fruitful English fields.

Goldsmith saw the light on the 10th of November, 1728, in the village of Pallas, county Longford. The son of a poor Irish clergyman, his wanderings began at two years of age by his family moving to the village of Lissoy, in Westmeath. Here were spent his early years, and he has immortalized the little place in his best known and most beautiful poem, *The Deserted Village*.

Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,
How often have I loitered o'er thy green,
Where humble happiness endeared each scene !

GREAT ENGLISH POETS

How often have I paused on every charm,
 The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
 The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
 The decent church that topt the neighbouring hill,
 The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
 For talking age and whispering lovers made !

.

Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,
 With blossom'd furze unprofitably gay,
 There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
 The village master taught his little school.
 A man severe he was, and stern to view ;
 I knew him well, and every truant knew :
 Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
 The day's disasters in his morning face ;
 Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee
 At all his jokes, for many a joke had he ;
 Full well the busy whisper circling round
 Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned.
 Yet he was kind, or, if severe in aught,
 The love he bore to learning was in fault ;
 The village all declared how much he knew :
 'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too :
 Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
 And e'en the story ran that he could gauge :
 In arguing, too, the person owned his skill ;
 For e'en though vanquished, he could argue still ;
 While words of learned length and thundering sound
 Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around ;
 And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
 That one small head could carry all he knew.

.

Sweet was the sound, when oft at evening's close
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose.
There, as I passed with careless steps and slow,
The mingling notes came softened from below ;
The swain responsive as the milkmaid sung,
The sober herd that lowed to meet their young,
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,
The playful children just let loose from school,
The watchdog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,
And the loud laugh that spake the vacant mind.

Perhaps some foreshadowing of his own wandering years may have fallen across the childish mind of Goldsmith as he too often saw "a bold peasantry"—victims of greed and famine—leaving their simple homes and "humble bowers" to seek an uncertain livelihood in the New World. For these lines, written when the man of forty odd felt recollections of the past pressing round his heart, are full of the anguish and despair of Irish emigration:—

When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,
Hung round the bowers, and fondly looked their last,
And took a long farewell, and wished in vain
For seats like these beyond the western main,
And shuddering still to face the distant deep,
Returned and wept, and still returned to weep.

But the happy careless days of Goldsmith's childhood were soon over. He was sent, a shy awkward boy pitted by smallpox, from one

boarding school to another. As a "sizar" or poor scholar at Trinity College, he wrote street ballads to eke out a hand-to-mouth existence. He started for the grand tour with a guinea in his pocket, and wandering through France, Germany, and Italy earned food and lodging by "disputations" in monasteries and flute-playing for villagers, and gained a dubious medical degree at either Louvain or Padua. In that graceful and reflective poem, *The Traveller*, he brings charmingly before our minds one of these days in his *Wanderjabre*.

How often have I led thy sportive choir
With tuneless pipe, beside the murmuring Loire?
Where shading elms along the margin grew,
And, freshened from the wave, the zephyr flew;
And haply, though my harsh touch faltering still,
But mocked all tune, and marred the dancer's skill,
Yet would the village praise my wondrous power,
And dance, forgetful of the noontide hour.

And this is part of his firmly-drawn, bright-hued picture of Holland, where "the broad ocean leans against the land":

. . . the pent ocean, rising o'er the pile,
Sees an amphibious world beneath him smile,
The slow canal, the yellow-blossomed vale,
The willow-tufted bank, the gliding sail,
The crowded mart, the cultivated plain,
A new creation rescued from his reign.



THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD.
After W. P. Frith, R.A.



At last Goldsmith straggled somehow to London, to be a threadbare physician in Southwark, an usher in a boys' school at Peckham, at best a publisher's hack. We see him in 1758, at thirty years of age, ungainly and down-at-heel; without friends, save those in distant Ireland; without a home, hiding in squalid garrets in back slums; without occupation, barring the remorseless hack-work which barely shielded him from destitution—"remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow."

He has drawn the picture for us in *The Traveller* in lines of pathetic beauty:—

Blest be that spot, where cheerful guests retire
To pause from toil, and trim their evening fire;
Blest that abode, where want and pain repair,
And every stranger finds a ready chair:
Blest be those feasts with simple plenty crowned,
Where all the ruddy family around
Laugh at the jests or pranks that never fail,
Or sigh with pity at some mournful tale;
Or press the bashful stranger to his food,
And learn the luxury of doing good.

But me, not destined such delights to share,
My prime of life in wandering spent and care:
Impelled, with steps unceasing to pursue
Some fleeting good, that mocks me with the view;

That, like the circle bounding earth and skies,
Allures from far, yet, as I follow, flies ;
My fortune leads to traverse realms alone,
And find no spot of all the world my own.

But times slowly brightened for a man who could deride Fortune as easily as he dropped her a tear. His *Description of an Author's Bedchamber* is but a poor example of Goldsmith's naturally high spirits—foolishly disregarded by too sentimental biographers.

The rusty grate unconscious of a fire :
With beer and milk arrears the frieze was scored,
And five cracked teacups dressed the chimney-board ;
A nightcap decked his brows instead of bay,
A cap by night—a stocking all the day !

His delightful nonsense verse, such as the elegies on *The Mad Dog*, *Mrs. Mary Blaize*—*The Glory of her Sex*, and the *Haunch of Venison*, are gay as butterflies and light as air.

In 1759 Goldsmith became the editor of the short-lived *Bee*, in which occurs his famous *City Night Piece*. Out of his contributions to the *Public Ledger* grew those delicately satirical letters, *The Citizen of the World*, which brought him modest fame and two hundred a year. He went to Bath and wrote the life of that king of fops

Beau Nash : finally he became the friend of Dr. Johnson and of the leading artists and literary men of his day. Meanwhile his masterpieces were growing line by line, page by page, in the shade of the tedious publishers' hack-work, which still had to be his chief means of support.

The Vicar of Wakefield, that wonderful novel which blooms eternally fresh as a whitethorn in May, was written amidst drudgery and debt, and written, too, with a painful care which one little suspects when reading his clear running prose. As William Black has said, "Any young writer who may imagine that the power of clear and concise literary expression comes by nature, cannot do better than study, in Mr. Cunningham's big collection of Goldsmith's writings, the continual and minute alterations which the author considered necessary even after the first edition—sometimes when the second and third editions—had been published."

Goethe, at the time of publication, said that *The Vicar of Wakefield* was one of the best novels ever written, and called it a "prose-idyll." It is certainly the musical prose of a true poet.

How brimful of sweet emotion and delight in calm nature is this description of the worthy vicar's return to his home :—

And now my heart caught new sensations of pleasure, the nearer I approached that peaceful mansion. As a bird that had been frightened from its nest, my affections outwent my haste, and hovered round my little fireside with all the rapture of expectation. . . . As I walked but slowly, the night waned apace. The labourers of the day were all retired to rest; the lights were out in every cottage; no sounds were heard but of the shrilling cock, and the deep-mouthed watchdog at hollow distance.

The old and familiar tale of the entry of this graceful and tender masterpiece into the world of fame is too ironical to be overlooked; moreover, it gives the key to Goldsmith's character. Boswell took it down from Johnson's own lips, though it should be said that one of Goldsmith's latest biographers, Mr. Austin Dobson, has pointed out that Newbery or Strahan (whichever publisher Johnson went to) only bought a share or shares in the work. For Benjamin Collins, a printer of Salisbury, is known to have bought a third share for twenty guineas. Johnson says :—



DR. JOHNSON READING "THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD" IN
GOLDSMITH'S LODGINGS.

After Sir John Gilbert, R.A.

I received one morning a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress, and, as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea, and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was dressed, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea, and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork into the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced to me. I looked into it, and saw its merit; told the landlady I should soon return; and having gone to a bookseller, sold it for £60. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a high tone for having used him so ill.

There can be no doubt that the greater part of Goldsmith's comparatively short life—he died from a fever, aggravated by a disquieted mind and his own neglect on 4th April, 1774, at the age of forty-six—was hard, sordid, and harassed by debt, but it cannot be overlooked that it was largely so by his own making.

Of these forty-six years the first twenty-one were spent at home, at school, and at college;

seven more in seeing the world ; and although in his wanderings he is said to have "begged his way through Europe," it must not be forgotten that for a young man in the eighteenth century to go through Europe in any manner was no mean privilege. The grand tour was the keystone of the arch of education for the young "buck" of rank and fortune, and he always set it in place with a due accompaniment of chariots, armed servants, and particular introductions. But the modest scholar had to forgo all this unless he were fortunate enough to fall in with a patron to pay expenses, as Horace Walpole had done for the poet Gray sixteen years before.

The remaining eighteen years of Goldsmith's life contained much misery and some great hardships, but we are told, on Lord Macaulay's calculation, that the last seven of these years saw him earning an annual income of £800—and this for a single man without other claims than those of natural and spontaneous generosity. At the most he suffered four utterly wretched years when hope and ambition seemed alike quenched and gone, but this, unfortunately, is not an extraordinary number in the lives of men

of genius—so many of whom have been “men of sorrows.”

Goldsmith was born with the happy-go-lucky extravagance and generosity of a true Irishman. To one starving creature with five children he gave at one time the blankets off his bed, and crept into the bedding for shelter from the cold. Yet as a practically penniless student in Edinburgh his tailor's bills have been found boasting the following items: “silver Hatt-Lace,” “Blew sattin,” and “best sfine high Clarett-colour'd Cloth at 19/- a yard.” The first night of his successful comedy, *The Good-Natured Man*, he appeared in a gorgeous suit of “Tyrian bloom, satin grain, and garter blue silk breeches”: and the £500 which it put into his pocket he spent in a few months, £400 being paid for a lease of chambers in Brick Court, Middle Temple, the other £100 dwindling away rapidly in their furnishing and decorating, and frolics and suppers with his friends.

She Stoops to Conquer was a roaring success from the first night; from his histories of Rome, of Greece, of England, and his *Animated Nature* he often received considerable sums in advance;

even *The Deserted Village* brought something, though the exact sum is not known—but the money ran through hands which had never learned to close upon it, and sank into the morass of debt which quaked beneath him at every step. No doubt poor Goldsmith's good nature was amply imposed on. One of his friends has said, "Our Doctor had a constant levee of his distress countrymen, whose wants as far as he was able he always relieved: and he has often been known to leave himself without a guinea, in order to supply the necessities of others."

When "the necessities of others" were not too pressing, the open-handed Irishman made haste to treat himself to luxuries which were not always worth the money. His fine clothes have already been mentioned; and there is no doubt that, despite an unprepossessing face and a blundering and awkward manner, he aspired now and then to shine as a dandy. Boswell, who was cattishly jealous of Goldsmith, has left a spiteful account of a dinner at his lodgings before which "Goldsmith strutted about bragging of his dress." David Garrick, one of the other

guests, demurred. "Let me tell you," retorted Goldsmith, "that when my tailor brought home my bloom-coloured coat, he said, 'Sir, I have a favour to beg of you. When anybody asks you who made your clothes, be pleased to mention John Filby, at the Harrow, in Water Lane.'"

Worthy Mr. Filby, of the Harrow, said after Goldsmith's death, "he had been a good customer, and had he lived would have paid every farthing."

We hear of no serious love-affair in Goldsmith's life. There has been foolish talk about the poet and the younger Miss Horneck, with whom, and her mother and sister, he made the only tour abroad which he took in later life. He nicknamed her the "Jessamy Bride" and her sister "Little Comedy"; but that both the romance of love and of foreign travel had left him by the time they were thus thrown together is shown pretty clearly by the following extract from a letter to Reynolds, written from Paris:—

I find that travelling at twenty and at forty are very different things. I set out with all my confirmed habits about me, and can find nothing on the Continent

so good as when I formerly left it. One of our chief amusements here is scolding at everything we meet with, and praising everything and every person we left at home. . . . I could tell you of disasters and adventures without number, of our lying in barns, and of my being half poisoned with a dish of green peas, of our quarrelling with postilions and being cheated by our landladies, but I reserve all this for a happy hour which I expect to share with you upon my return. . . . I will soon be among you, better pleased with my situation at home than I ever was before. And yet I must say, that if anything could make France pleasant, the very good women with whom I am at present would certainly do it. I could say more about that, but I intend showing them this letter before I send it away.

Goldsmith died £2000 in debt. "Was ever poet so trusted before?" He was buried in the Temple Church on 9th April, 1774, but his precise resting-place (like poor Mozart's—the Goldsmith of Music) is unknown. Some two years later a monument was erected to him by his friends in Westminster Abbey, Johnson writing "the poor dear Doctor's epitaph." In that memorial to his fame Johnson has said he "left scarcely any style of writing untouched, and touched nothing he did not adorn"; but

Johnson's wisest words were these: "He had raised money and squandered it by every artifice of acquisition and folly of expense. But let not his frailties be remembered: he was a very great man." And it is good to think that the gentle spirit of this harassed vagrant has at length found a home—the home which his world-wide admirers, in each generation, make anew for him in their hearts. He prophesied it for himself in *The Traveller*,

Creation's heir, the world, the world is mine!

Like Gray's and Cowper's, Goldsmith's greatness as an English poet needs explaining. By the side of Chaucer and Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, the "great" poets of the Johnsonian epoch were puny weaklings. Nevertheless, as we look back at them, we see them towering up above their still smaller contemporaries with all the mountainous importance of sand-hills on the Belgian shore.

In the days of Chaucer, when Englishmen found that they had assimilated the Normans instead of becoming an island Normandy; and in the days of Shakespeare, when England had

beaten Spain ; and, again, in the days of Blake and Wordsworth and Coleridge and Shelley and Keats, when the French Revolution had shaken all human institutions to their foundations—in such days it was inevitable that giant poets should arise. But, under the earlier Georges, when cynicism had spread from politics to every part of life, there was not enough fresh air for a great poet to breathe in. It was an age not for poets but for satirists and critics and wits. A towny smartness became the key-note of literature. But Goldsmith persistently tuned his lyre in harmony with the immortal English bards rather than with the pipers and fiddlers of the hour. His lay was mild. But it was in the right key, and it is to be honoured as a restful and genial interlude in the vast music of English poetry. He was one of the careful and interesting performers who helped to keep the instrument in tune against the day when bolder and stronger hands should make it resound once more with the mightiest harmonies.

WILLIAM COWPER

IF the author of *The Task* could have fore-known that he would survive in English literature by virtue of his casual letters rather than of his deliberate poetry, and that his fame as a poet would ultimately rest upon a comic ballad written in a single night, he would have had some justification for the melancholy which brooded over his life. Nowadays it is more of a task to read Cowper's most ambitious poem than it was for the poet to write it; and more than one reader of this book will wonder at his inclusion in a volume which has not made room for Campbell, Thomson, and Southey. Nevertheless, Cowper, like Gray, claims a place among his betters, because he did after all succeed in implanting at least one work deep in the heart of the people. And when the people decline to give up the galloping *John Gilpin*, and the Imperialist *Boadicea*, and the haunting *Alex-*

ander Selkirk, the people show themselves good critics.

Cowper's father, the Rev. John Cowper, D.D., was rector of Berkhamsted and chaplain to George the Second; and the great-uncle after whom he was named had filled the high position of Lord Chancellor under Queen Anne and George the First. His mother was a Donne, of the same family as the bishop and poet of that name, and though she died when her son was only six years old, her memory was cherished by him in after-life with most affectionate regard. All who know anything of the name of Cowper are familiar with the lines written on the receipt of his mother's picture, fifty years after her death, in which he says :—

My mother ! when I learn'd that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed ?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch even then, life's journey just begun ?
Perhaps thou gav'st me, though unfelt, a kiss ;
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss—
Ah, that maternal smile !—it answers—Yes.

With the wound of his great sorrow still bleeding, the poor sensitive child was sent to a boarding-school where, to his shrinking nature,

the change from a comfortable home was rendered acutely painful. He said :—

I had hardships of various kinds to conflict with, which I felt more sensibly in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home. But my chief affliction consisted in my being singled out from all the other boys by a lad of about fifteen years of age as a proper object on whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal a particular recital of many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than to his knees, and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress. May the Lord pardon him, and may we meet in glory !

It speaks worlds for Cowper's charity that he should be able to tolerate the idea of meeting such a wretch again, either here or hereafter.

Fortunately a liability to inflammation of the eyes made it desirable that he should be taken from school for a season and placed in the house of an oculist. Here he remained in less discomfort for two years, and then proceeded to Westminster School, where he continued until his eighteenth year, joining freely in boyish sports,

and becoming sufficiently familiar with Latin and Greek to render classical studies a delight to him in later life. Destined for the Bar, he next spent three years in an attorney's office ; but flirtations, "giggling and making giggle," with his cousins, Theodora and Harriet, daughters of Ashley Cowper, then resident in Southampton Row, were much more congenial occupation than the study of the law. The father of these ladies used to wear a white hat lined with yellow, and as he was also of small stature, Cowper remarked slyly that the little man would one day be picked by mistake for a mushroom. One is tempted to wonder if this joke offended the little man's dignity, and if he had it in mind when afterwards he declined to allow Theodora to become wife to her cousin, basing his refusal on the fact of their relationship.

It was a bitter disappointment to the young people : both remained unmarried, and, though they never met again, each continued interested in the other's well-being. It is generally supposed that Ashley Cowper had doubts as to his nephew's ability to make a living. "What will you do if you marry William Cowper?" he asked of Theodora. "Do, Sir!" she replied.

“Wash all day, and ride out on the great dog all night !” Which shows at least that the lady had some spirit ; and had her lover evinced as much, it is not unlikely he would have won his cousin, and so changed the whole current of his life.

Cowper had chambers for some years in the Inner Temple, and was formally called to the Bar. But he never practised, and his time was devoted more to literary than to legal studies. He became a member of the Nonesense Club, which consisted of seven Westminster men who met and dined together every Thursday ; was friendly with Thornton and Colman, wits of the period ; admired the poetry of Churchill ; and also contributed papers to the *Connoisseur* and to the *St. James's Chronicle*.

In one of the poems addressed to “ Delia ” (his Cousin Theodora), written at this period, there seems to be a foreboding of the crisis that was drawing upon him. He cries :—

Bid adieu, my sad heart, bid adieu to thy peace !
Thy pleasure is past, and thy sorrows increase ;
See the shadows of evening how far they extend,
And a long night is coming, that never may end ;
For the sun is now set that enlivened the scene,
And an age must be past ere it rises again.

The "long night" overtook Cowper when he was thirty-two, and still resident in the Temple. His nomination as Clerk of the Journals in the House of Lords had been secured for him by his kinsman, Major Cowper, and for some months he gave up his whole time to preparation for the office. Inborn timidity, however, and distrust of his own powers rendered him miserable; and when the day of examination arrived his mind was quite unhinged, and fear and despair drove him to an attempt upon his life. Months of confinement ensued, under the care of Dr. Cotton, at St. Alban's.

When sufficiently recovered, Cowper secured lodgings at Huntingdon, and settled down to a retired life, his relatives rendering him timely assistance. He had now become decidedly, almost fanatically, religious, and soon found an introduction to the household of the Rev. William Unwin, an evangelical clergyman. Of this household, consisting of father and mother, with a son and daughter, all as extremely pious as himself, Cowper speedily became a permanent inmate. Of their manner of life he has left

us a description in one of his many charming letters :

As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none. The place indeed swarms with them; and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the gentle inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessories to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven we read either the scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day, and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation until tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors or sing some hymn of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts I hope are the best performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When

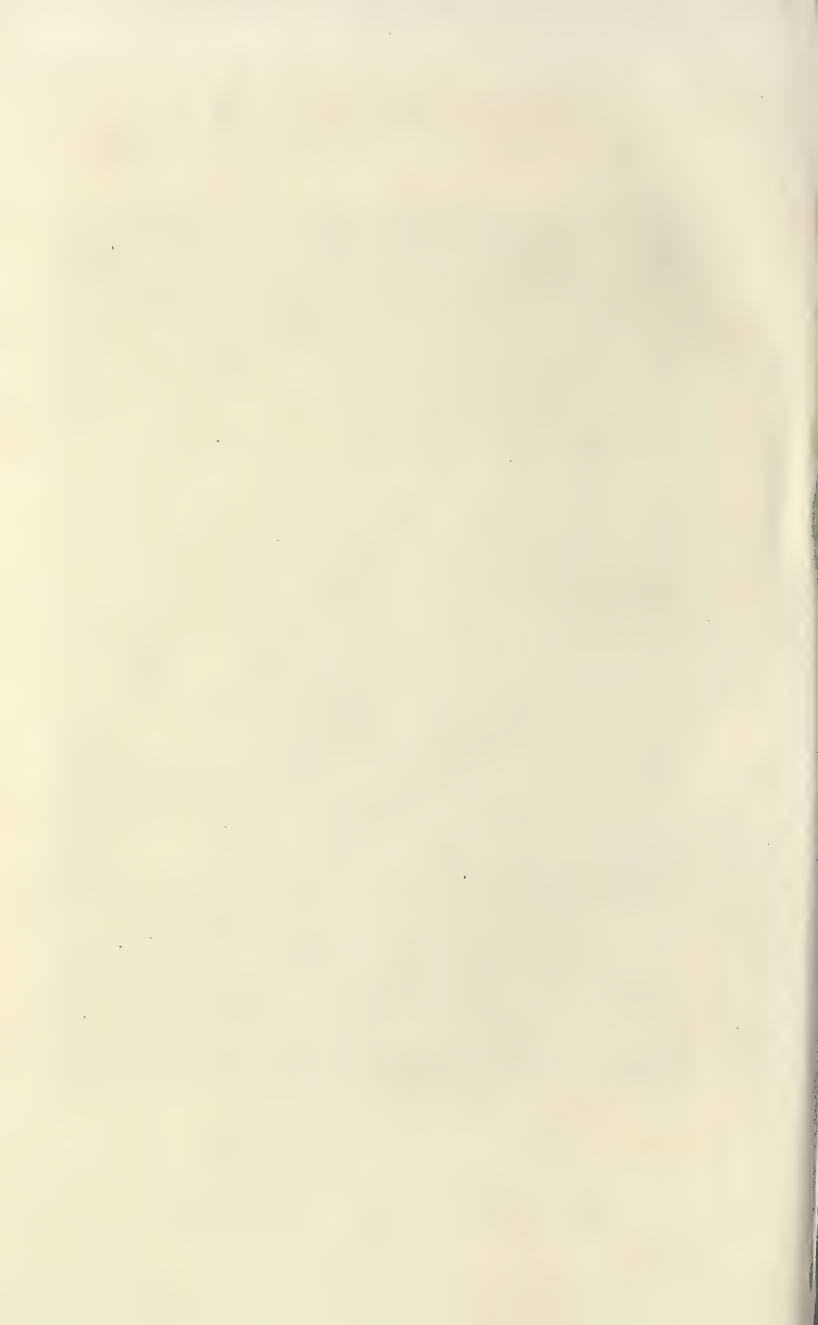
the days are short we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse as before till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers.

After two years of this sort of life which he describes as "consistent with the utmost cheerfulness," though many will take leave to doubt it, the Unwin household was broken up by the death of its head through a fall from his horse. Mrs. Unwin and Cowper joined their resources, and settled together at Olney, in Buckinghamshire. "The house," says Professor Goldwin Smith, "in which the pair took up their abode was dismal, prison-like, and tumble-down. . . . It looked upon the Market Place, but it was in the close neighbourhood of Silver End, the worst part of Olney. In winter the cellars were full of water. There were no pleasant walks within easy reach, and in winter Cowper's only exercise was pacing thirty yards of gravel, with the dreary supplement of dumb-bells." The town itself was a dull one on the banks of the "slow winding" Ouse, with "occurrences as scarce as cucumbers at Christmas."



COWPER'S FAVOURITE SEAT AT EARTHAM. LOOKING TOWARDS
THE ISLE OF WIGHT: WITH PORTRAITS OF HAYLEY (BY BAINES),
YOUNG HAYLEY (BY HUNMAN), CHARLOTTE SMITH (BY OPIE),
COWPER (BY ABBOT), AND ROMNEY (BY HIMSELF.)

After W. Harvey.



The great attraction of Olney was the Rev. John Newton, the evangelical curate of the parish, who soon obtained considerable influence over Cowper, and so tightened the strain of pious devotion that the poet's mind once more gave way. Through the dismal shadows of sixteen months of depression, Mrs. Unwin nursed him night and day, and his recovery was owing in large measure to her unremitting care. Wisely, too, she urged upon him the desirability of distracting his thoughts from himself by poetic composition, though the subject suggested — *The Progress of Error* — was not the happiest. As the result, Cowper's first published volume was issued in 1782.

To Lady Austen, a woman of quite a different stamp, is due the credit of inspiring another of Cowper's poems—*The Task*. The lively widow of a baronet, she visited Olney in 1781, met the poet, was attracted by him, and had rooms fitted for herself to be near him. "A person that has seen much of the world, and understands it well, has high spirits, a lively fancy, and great readiness of conversation"; so he writes of her. She told him the story of *John Gilpin*, which kept

him laughing half the night through, and which by the next morning he had turned into the famous ballad. When she urged him to try his hand at blank verse, he replied, "I will, if you will give me a subject." "You can write on any subject," she answered, looking up from the sofa on which she reclined. "Write upon this sofa." So was begun *The Task*, the first book of which is entitled *The Sofa*.

I sing the Sofa. I who lately sang
Truth, Hope, and Charity, and touched with awe
The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand
Escaped with pain from that adventurous flight,
Now seek repose upon an humbler theme ;
The theme though humble, yet august and proud
The occasion—for the Fair commands the song.

The few years during which Lady Austen sojourned at Olney were of the brightest in Cowper's history. It was hardly to be expected, however, that Mrs. Unwin, who was so strongly attached to him, and had done so much for him, would take quietly the presence of a rival. A breach occurred, the "threefold cord" was broken, and, though repairs were effected, a final severance took place in 1783, before *The Task* was completed. This poem, with

Tirocinium, a rhyming treatise on education, and *The Diverting History of John Gilpin*, formed the contents of Cowper's second published volume. It brought him fame, and secured for him the place he holds in English literature, to say nothing of a pension of £300 a year. One compliment, of an amusingly doubtful nature, it obtained for him by bringing to Olney the clerk of All Saints', Northampton, with a request that he would write the verses appended to the annual records of mortality in that parish. Cowper suggested modestly that there were several men of genius in the parish, particularly Mr. Cox, a first-rate maker of verses. The clerk's reply was that he had already obtained verses from the gentleman named, but he was a man of such wide reading that the people could not understand him.

In his version of Homer, Cowper aimed at improving on Pope by giving a literal translation, and it is generally admitted that he has succeeded in making it literally dull. Some of his hymns and shorter pieces have won for him far higher appreciation and a far wider audience. Thousands of persons who would not care

to commit themselves as to whether Homer wrote in Greek or in Latin, know in their hearts that *God moves in a mysterious way* and *Sometimes a light surprises* are somehow better than the mass of hymns and pious verses.

After the departure of Lady Austen, Cowper's life was brightened by frequent visits from his cousin, Lady Hesketh, sister to his early love, Theodora. She furthered his removal to Weston, a healthier house in the neighbourhood, belonging to Mr. Throckmorton, a Roman Catholic gentleman, with whom and his wife the poet was on very friendly terms. Here, however, his old malady returned, and Mrs. Unwin was stricken with paralysis. She died in 1796 at East Dereham, whither she and Cowper had been removed by their friend Hayley, in hope of physical benefit. The poet, at the sight of her dead face, uttered one passionate cry, and never spoke of her again. During the three and a half years longer through which he lived, silence and mental darkness were his portion. The shadow was broken by fitful and momentary gleams, but never lifted. In the February preceding his death, on being asked how he felt,

he answered, "I feel unutterable despair." He died quietly on 25th April, 1800, in his sixty-ninth year.

In his poetry English rural life, the English appreciation of domestic comfort and the English fondness for moral reflection find copious and not unhappy expression. His pictures of natural scenery and household ways betray the photographer rather than the artist. With almost feminine minuteness we are made to see what is to be seen in the object before us; but there is no hint let fall of aught beyond, either in the soul of the singer or in that vaster soul which it is the glory of the greater singers to reveal. All the same, he rendered services to English poetry even on its technical side. His best work exhibits ease and fluency without degenerating into glibness. Under Pope, verse moved with the stately slowness of a minuet: but Cowper taught it to run like a child escaped from school and to gallop like John Gilpin's horse.

THOMAS CHATTERTON

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI declared that "the absolutely miraculous Chatterton" was "without any reservation whatever as great as any of the English poets." Such words as these, coming from a man who was not only himself a poet but also one of the discoverers of Blake and FitzGerald, cannot be laughed away. Indeed, the danger in treating of Chatterton is not lest one should lift him too high, but lest one may thrust him too low. There is an idea abroad that the pathos of his death has kept his poetry alive: yet the truth is that his poetical achievement has been generally lost sight of in the shadow of his personal tragedy. It was by performance as well as by promise that he earned the title of a great English poet.

Born and reared in the shadow of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, Chatterton must have felt that

"wonder of mansions," as he affectionately called the ancient pile, a very part of himself. To its muniment room he owed his delight in the past, and to his ancestors, perhaps, his too free jesting with death. For a hundred and twenty years those ancestors had been sextons at St. Mary's and had gathered home, generation by generation, its parishioners to the old churchyard.

Chatterton's father had broken the sexton chain. More ambitious than his forbears, he obtained the mastership of a free school a few yards from St. Mary's, and was appointed "sub-chaunter" in Bristol Cathedral. But when little Thomas saw the light, on 20th November, 1752, his poor young mother had been a widow for four months, and was supporting herself and his two-year-old sister by a little dame's school and by taking in needlework.

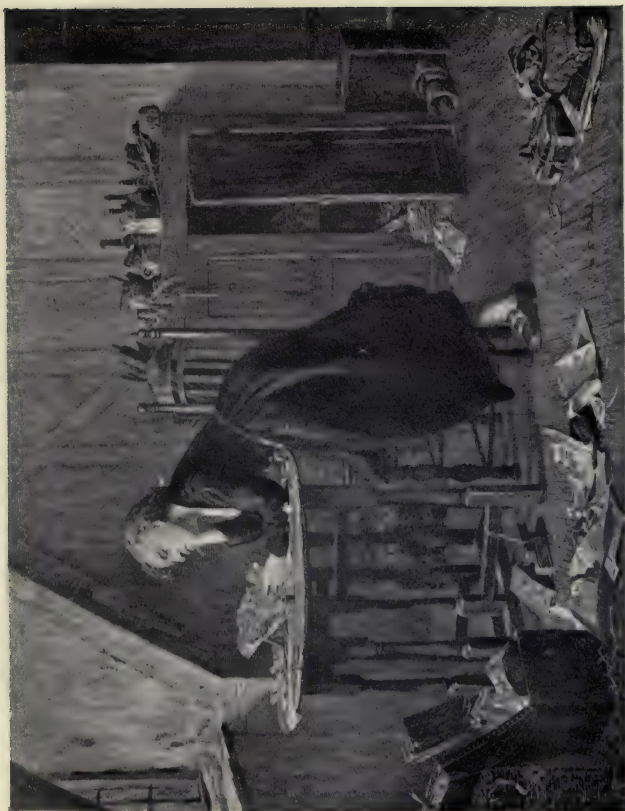
Like Goldsmith the boy was thought a dullard. He was sent home from his first school as incapable of receiving instruction, and he would sit for hours crying softly to himself, or wrapped in strange abstraction. But the old manuscripts and ancient parchments, which were ever after-

wards to be his chief preoccupation, unsealed his eyes. His mother says that one day, when the boy was between six and seven years old, she was tearing up an old music folio which had belonged to her husband, when the illuminated capitals took the child's fancy and "he fell in love with it."

It became an easy way of teaching him his letters, and then he was coaxed into reading by the aid of a black-letter Bible.

Chatterton's "sleepless soul" once aroused never again slept. "He read from the moment he waked, which was early, until he went to bed, if they would let him." He pounced upon every scrap of old learning, and drew and designed, in charcoal and pencil, for hours together. Heraldry and mediæval subjects had the greatest charm for him, and he was unusually fortunate in having the run of the two boxes of old documents which his father had brought home years before from a kind of spring cleaning at St. Mary's muniment room as waste-paper.

Here is one of the few cases in which vandalism has had good results. That MSS. of the Middle Ages, even if they recorded nothing



CHATTERTON'S HOLIDAY.
After W. B. Morris.

more than obscure births and marriages and deaths, should be lightly dispersed, was, in itself, outrageous: but it was from these old manuscripts that Chatterton derived his knowledge of Anglo-Saxon and the idea of producing a series of MSS. supposed to be the newly-discovered writings of one Thomas Rowley, a priest of the fifteenth century. Chatterton has written sadly:—

Rowley . . . my first, chief curse!
For had I never known the antique lore,
I ne'er had ventured from my peaceful shore
To be the wreck of promises and hopes,
A Boy of Learning and a Bard of Tropes.

Chatterton's second school was Colston's Hospital—the Bluecoat School of Bristol. His mad thirst for old learning and books was now remarkable. All his small sums of pocket-money went to the circulating library. He would read when others were at play, and often pass the whole day without eating, especially avoiding animal food, which he said impaired the intellect. His aim, like Pope's, was to be a poet, but a poet whose fame should sound to the ends of the earth. As a child he had said when asked

by a potter what device he would like painted on a small bowl: "Paint me an angel with wings and a trumpet to trumpet my name over the world."

The boy of fifteen was apprenticed to Lambert, an attorney in Bristol, the day he left school. His new master was sour-tempered, and the proud young poet had to sleep with the foot-boy and take his meals with the servants. It is said that the footman was frequently sent into the office to see if Chatterton was there, and if Attorney Lambert found the youth writing poetry instead of doing professional work, he would angrily tear into pieces what he called Chatterton's "stuff."

In spite, however, of this somewhat natural interference from the undiscerning attorney Chatterton managed to compose during this period the greater number of the beautiful Rowley poems—those poems which have been one of the chief sources of the modern Romantic Movement in English poetry.

There is little doubt now that Chatterton wrote his verses first of all in modern English, and then, by the help of an Anglo-Saxon glossary, compiled by himself, translated them into the

Rowleian dialect or pseudo Middle English, in which he gave them to the world.

One of the finest of these poems, *An Excelente Ballad of Charitie*, was written in London, a month before his death, when his courage and resources were well-nigh done, and his "solemn agony" (as Shelley has so finely and reverently called it) was gathering to its tragic close. It is concluded that Chatterton was speaking to himself in these lines addressed to the "hapless pilgrim":—

Haste to thy church-glebe-house, accursed man!
Haste to thy grave, thy only sleeping bed.
Cold as the clay which will grow on thy head
Are Charity and Love among high elves;
Knightés and barons live for pleasure and themselves.

The following remarkable lines from the same poem, describing the breaking of a summer storm, justify Coleridge's description of Chatterton as "free Nature's genial child."

The gathered storm is ripe; the big drops fall,
The sun-burnt meadows smoke and drink the rain;
The coming ghastness doth the cattle pall,
And the full flocks are driving o'er the plain;
Dashed from the clouds, the waters fly again;
The welkin opes; the yellow lightning flies,
And the hot fiery steam in the broad flashings dies.

It is remarkable how closely the youth kept the secret of his Rowley forgeries, even bemusing the friendly but dull Dr. Barrett, who was an antiquarian authority in Bristol, and the owner of a library useful for Chatterton's purposes.

One of his friends has related how Chatterton would often say, when a new poem had just been completed :—

Come, you and I will take a walk in the meadow.
I have got the cleverest thing for you that ever was.
It is worth half-a-crown merely to have a sight of it,
and to hear me read it to you.

Two publishers were tried with the Rowley "finds" without success, and then the happy notion occurred to Chatterton of sending them to Horace Walpole, who was endeavouring to revive a taste for the Gothic period in art.

A patron, in Chatterton's day, was still part of the necessary and desirable "plant" of an indigent poet, and Walpole by his tastes, wealth, and social standing seemed the man most plainly indicated. What would have been the future course of the poor widow's son had Walpole been "his brother's keeper" is a matter of useless conjecture. As it was, Walpole showed the

petted selfishness of a superfine dilettante, who is worried by frequent appeals from less fortunate men, and his unhandsome conduct scarred a wound in the lad's proud sensitive heart which smarted to the end.

But Chatterton's serving days in Bristol were numbered. As a freelance he had had his writings accepted by the Bristol papers and the London magazines : and with the hardy valour of one of his own knights upon him, he felt he must ride forth to take the town by storm and plant his ensign upon its loftiest pinnacles.

He had stayed in Bristol long enough, however, to earn five shillings for a false pedigree from a well-to-do, gullible pewterer, and to hoax the whole town with a sham description, "from an old Manuscript," of the opening of Bristol Bridge in 1248. It remained for him to draw up, and leave open upon his desk, a document which produced such an effect upon Attorney Lambert that he cancelled his apprentice's indentures, and was clearly glad to let so strange and uncanny a fledgling go free. This last will and testament of Thomas Chatterton, "Executed in the presence of Omniscience this 14th of

April, 1770," is still preserved in the Bristol Institution.

Whether Chatterton really intended to commit suicide is doubtful. It seems more probable that his savage fitful moods with his fellow servants having failed, he tried this plan of scaring his master into releasing him. The will, with its charming nonsense and absurd "items," reads too satirically to have been seriously intended : though the letter Chatterton wrote to Dr. Barrett, who had moved the youth to tears over a former threat of suicide, both indicates some mad intention on Chatterton's part, and at the same time reveals the mainspring of all his actions. He says in answer to Barrett's charge that he was drawn to "the horrible crime of self-murder" by "the bad company and principles" he had adopted :—

In regard to my Motives for the supposed rashness, I shall observe that I keep no worse Company than *myself*; I never drink to Excess, and have, without Vanity, too much Sense to be attached to the mercenary retailers of Iniquity. No, it is my PRIDE, my damn'd, native, unconquerable Pride, that plunges me into Distraction. You must know that the 19-20th of my Composition is Pride. I

must either live a Slave, a Servant; to have no will of my own, no Sentiments of my own which I may freely declare as such;—or DIE. Perplexing Alternative! but it distracts me to think of it. I will endeavour to learn Humility, but it cannot be here. What it may cost me in the trial Heaven knows!

Chatterton settled in London towards the end of April, 1770—a mere boy of barely eighteen, with a little store of money and a very large store of hope. He lodged in Shoreditch at a plasterer's, and took his meals with a Mrs. Ballance, a relative, who stayed in the same house. Always abstemious in diet, his dinner became often nothing more than a tart and a glass of cold water. The plasterer's son, who shared Chatterton's bedroom, said he sometimes saw him pull a sheep's tongue out of his pocket to nibble at, but this was the only animal food he seems to have eaten. The same boy says he never seemed to sleep, for he did not go to bed till three or four in the morning, and yet was always awake first. Semi-starvation and feverish brain-work seemed to have reduced him almost to a spirit. He tried every form of literature from a sprightly extravaganza for Marylebone Gardens to a poem in the *Gospel Magazine*.

Before he left Bristol Chatterton's chief hopes had been centred on certain political writings. From these he had hoped to earn a living wage, and, in fact, he was for a brief space successful. But the tide of political opinion turned. To complete his disappointment, Beckford, the Lord Mayor, who had been interested in him and disposed to be a patron, died suddenly in the month of June.

Nevertheless, in his earlier letters home, Chatterton wrote in high spirits. He had been to see the sights in town and to sit in the literary coffee-houses. He seems to have met the usual number of boastful gossips, whose acquaintance includes all the great and whose generous promises are but sounding brass. All the magazines were accepting his poems and articles, and he was about to write "a voluminous history of London." Each letter brims with sweet solicitude for his mother and his sister. He says, "I will send you two silks this summer," and again, "I am now about an Oratorio, which, when finished, will purchase you a gown." Out of his first adequate earnings—which were the five guineas from Marylebone Gardens—he sent

home a box of presents. "Red china" and "a snuff-box right French, and very curious" for his mother, a silver fan for his sister, and "some British herb tobacco for my grandmother."

Life, however, was not so rosy as he painted it. Mrs. Ballance declared that he was "as proud as Lucifer." He soon got across with her for calling him "Cousin Tommy," and asked her whether she had ever heard of a poet being called "Tommy"!

The plasterer seems to have observed little about the young poet in spite of his brilliant grey eyes, one strangely brighter than the other. He says laconically that "there was something manly and pleasing about him, and that he did not dislike the wenches."

But the months had worn away and Chatterton found himself in the hopeless toils of a London August—to the wealthy and the patron a few butterfly hours of golden delight by silver seas, to the poor and the dependent an endless century of stifle and dirt in hot drab streets. Beckford was dead, the literary market was already overstocked with Chatterton's wares,

and the tradesmen would not pay for what they had consumed.

Chatterton made one last desperate effort, and tried to go out to sea as a surgeon's mate. He applied to Barrett for the necessary certificate, without revealing in any way his destitute condition. But—as with Goldsmith thirteen years before—the scheme failed. Chatterton had not the happy-go-lucky temperament or the hardened physique of a Goldsmith. He had lost his hope in man and his faith in God, and the wretched despairing boy could not “learn Humility.” Unable to bring himself to borrow either from Mrs. Ballance or the plasterer, he changed his rooms to Holborn so that none should know of his distressing poverty. His landlady said afterwards that, knowing he had not eaten for two or three days, she begged he would take some dinner with her, but he appeared affronted, and “assured her he was not hungry.”

Nature would stand no more. Over-work, anxiety, lack of care and nourishment had done their fatal work, and the flame of his wild spirit waxed and grew till it burst all bounds, and in one wild leap provoked that act of self-destruc-



Photograph by W. A. Mansell.

THE DEATH OF CHATTERTON.
After Henry Wallis.



tion which he anticipated and sought to excuse in one of his own essays as "a noble insanity of the soul." On Friday night, 24th August, 1770, Chatterton locked the door of his room and took arsenic in water. When later on his room was broken into they found that he had torn every fragment of unpublished manuscript that he possessed into tiny pieces and scattered them upon the floor.

Thus ended this most mournful life. Pride—the fatal but not wholly contemptible "nineteen-twentieths" of pride—dominated him to the end, and the optimistic boy who had raised the hopes of those he loved best by rosy dreams and golden prospects could not bring himself to say that his London experiment was a failure. Hard common sense protests that he ought to have retreated to Bristol *pour mieux sauter*, or to have borrowed more money. But we must not forget that his so tragic and pitiful death has raised all over the world the level of consideration for impecunious genius. Thus Chatterton is Poetry's martyr.

It is noteworthy that while Chatterton was inventing Rowley in the muniment room of

St. Mary's, Macpherson was sending forth the mixture of forgery and tradition which he labelled with the name of Ossian. But while the bombastic Ossian took all Europe by storm, the magnificent Rowley remains to this day almost unknown outside a narrow circle. We have wept over Chatterton long enough ; and the time has come to dry our eyes and read him.

WILLIAM BLAKE

HOW many people could give, off-hand, any account whatever of Götzenberger? Not one in a hundred thousand. Yet this long-dead German painter spoke so wise a word about two of our English poets that a whole century has hardly sufficed to bring all its wisdom to light. "In England," said Götzenberger, "I saw many men of talent: but only three men of genius. They were Coleridge, Flaxman, and Blake; and the greatest of these was Blake."

Despite the apostolic labours of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and of Mr. Swinburne, Blake's immense poetical importance is still far from being generally granted. Thousands of readers who willingly bow before the beauty and splendour of his grandest works obstinately go on believing that Blake was an amazing outsider, a freak of nature, or, if one may use the words, a gorgeous side-show just off the highway trodden by the

pageant of English poetry properly so-called. The truth is that, so far as his best work is concerned, Blake is vitally linked both with the great poets who had gone before him and with the great poets who have come after. His influence on the rising generation of literary men is enormous : and it is coming to be as unthinkable to leave Blake out of a book on the greater English poets as to leave out Keats.

In candour, it must be allowed that Blake himself is largely responsible for the misunderstandings which have caused the primmer critics to shunt him on to a side-track and to label him as a madman. Having a contempt for money and for social success, he saw no reason why he should make concessions to the dull minds around him ; and, accordingly, he was for ever shocking his hearers by speaking of the world of imagination as easily and boldly as other men spoke of the world of every-day fact. What was the hard-headed eighteenth century to make of a man who calmly remarked that he had met Milton on the stairs ; that he had sketched the heads of Moses and Julius Cæsar, who had given him sittings ; that he had drawn the ghost

of a flea ; and that in his forty-fourth year he had witnessed a fairy's funeral and had seen the fairy's tiny body borne in a rose-leaf to the grave ?

Blake was a Londoner, bred and born, as appears from his Cockney rhyming of "Wardle" with "caudle." His father was a fairly well-to-do hosier of Broad Street, Golden Square, who, although he could not send his son to a public school and a university, was enlightened enough to bring him up as an artist instead of a tradesman. William was born on 28th November, 1757. He lost no time. At four he "saw God pressing His forehead against the window." A few years later he surprised a swarm of bright angels clustering like starlings in a tree on Peckham Rye. Again, he saw angels walking in a field among the haymakers. To short-sighted parents these visions would have suggested stern measures: but Blake's father happily sent the dreamer to acquire the power of putting his dreams on paper at a drawing-school in the Strand. More. He allowed him driblets of pocket-money with which "the little connoisseur," as collectors and auctioneers fondly called

him, could occasionally bid for an engraving or two at a sale.

Of all recorded precocities none, not even Mozart's, is more astounding than Blake's. In his childish picture-buying he ran counter to the taste of the day and discovered, of his own motion, the supreme merits of artists so different as Raphael and Albert Dürer. In later life he wrote :—

I cannot say that Raphael ever was, from my earliest childhood, hidden from me. I saw and I knew immediately the difference between Raphael and Rubens.

And again :—

Rubens thinks tables, chairs, and stools are grand ;
But Raphael thinks a head, a foot, a hand.

Nor was his precocity confined to one art. At the age of twelve he had already composed these magical verses :—

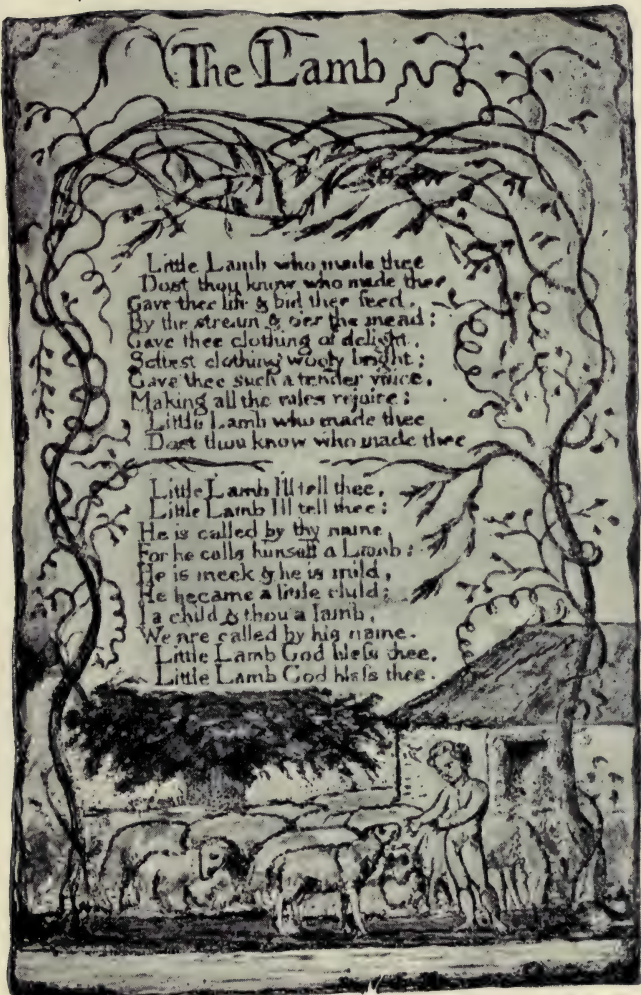
How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

He shewed me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow ;
He led me through his gardens fair
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

The Lamb

Little Lamb who make thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed,
By the stream & over the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing woolly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice;
Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee;
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child;
A child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb God bless thee,
Little Lamb God bless thee.



THE LAMB.

From William Blake's "Songs of Innocence."

With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
And Phœbus fired my vocal rage ;
He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me,
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty.

It would be hard to say wherein the lad showed the deeper insight — into engraving or into poetry. But, as one does not apprentice one's boys to a poet, Blake's father had little hesitation in apprenticing him to an engraver. Ryland was the first master approached : but, after their interview, the pupil exclaimed, "Father, that man's face looks as if he will live to be hanged" — a prophecy which came true. In the long run, Blake was bound to James Basire. Under Basire the apprentice perfected himself in a hard and dry style of engraving. But there was no hardening and drying of his mind. Basire was engraver to the Society of Antiquaries, and Blake, at his most impressionable age, spent hundreds of hours shut up in the dim and ghostly vastness of Westminster Abbey, copying the tombs of mouldering kings.

Meanwhile the Royal Academy had come into being, and had begun, as it meant to go on, by appointing a conventional and academical keeper. To this precious person, Moser by name, Blake repaired at the age of twenty for a little supplementary instruction. But when he disclosed his love of Raphael and Marc Antonio Moser was horrified. "Leave such old, hard, dry, stiff, unfinished works of art alone," he commanded. "Study these." And he opened some "galleries" of Rubens and Le Brun. The pupil's answer was swift and splendid. "These things which you call finished," he said, "are not even begun."

At twenty-five Blake carried on the long tradition of the English poets by wooing a damsel who said him nay. Like Spenser, he was garrulous about his grief, especially in the cottage of one Boucher, a market-gardener at Battersea, where there was a dark and handsome daughter named Catherine.

"I pity you from my heart," said Catherine, when the tale of the disdainful Clara had been told.

"Do you pity me?" the newly-rejected one asked eagerly.

"Yes, I do most sincerely."

"Then I love you for that," cried Blake.

"And I love . . . you," confessed the ingenuous beauty.

At the wedding poor Catherine could not sign her name and had to make her mark. But the marriage turned out more than well. Over and above her old-fashioned wifely devotion, Catherine Blake seems to have had an unending sense of her husband's lonely greatness. If he sprang from bed to wrestle with a thought or to fix an inspiration she would rise also and would sit beside him for hours quietly holding his hand. For the greater part of her life she endured poverty : yet the loudest complaint she ever made when her unpractical lord lost sight of his bread-winning in some glittering maze of vision was to set an empty plate on the table before him. Monuments of her love and patience still exist in the copies of Blake's works which she coloured by hand : and the fortunate owners of these treasures ought to be doubly happy in the fact that they possess the relics of a saint as well as the masterpieces of a poet.

Although Blake lived seventy strenuous years

and is said to have composed a greater bulk of poetry than Shakespeare and Milton combined, only two tiny books of his were printed and published during his lifetime in the ordinary way. A year after his marriage appeared *Poetical Sketches*, Blake's book of juvenilia. The printer's bill was paid by a generous friend, the Rev. Henry Mathews, and the volume met with the fate which awaits nineteen out of every twenty volumes of youthful verse. Eight years later, in 1791, was printed and published *The French Revolution. In Seven Books. Book I*: but this poem, one of Blake's feeblest efforts, fell flat, and Book II never saw the daylight. With these two small exceptions, no printer or publisher deemed it worth while to touch Blake's verses till he was dead.

After the sending forth of *Poetical Sketches*, Blake began building up the little books of poems which entitle him to be regarded as the most sheerly inspired of all the English poets; and when no publisher would risk a farthing upon them, the author resolved to sell copies himself at the little print-shop where he earned his living. The submissive Catherine was sent

out with the couple's last half-crown to buy the raw materials for Blake's new process of printing. His method was to write his poem (in reverse) with an impervious liquid upon a copper-plate, afterwards plunging the plate in acid until the naked parts of the copper were eaten down, leaving the coated letters in relief, like printers' type. The margins of the pages were adorned with designs; and after the copies had been printed off in black or tinted ink, colours were added by hand. The finished product rudely recalled an illuminated manuscript. According to Blake, the spirit of his dead brother Robert disclosed to him this cheap and ingenious process, while St. Joseph was good enough to add a further revelation with regard to the diluting of colours with glue. Mrs. Blake folded the printed sheets and sewed them into boards. A single copy was sold for about a guinea, less or more, according to the goodwill of the patron. In this manner, *Songs of Innocence* (1787), *Songs of Experience* (1794), *The Book of Thel* (1789), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), and a number of "Prophetical Books" were given to a narrow circle which is

widening every year towards the utmost boundaries of the English-speaking world.

The obscure and confused "Prophetical Books" have become the happy hunting grounds of mystical commentators whose confident feet have so far only added clouds of dust to Blake's original darkness. Here and there, as in the book *Jerusalem*, one finds a lucid interval; but, in the main, the prophet seems to have lost touch with his hearers so completely that the hearers may reasonably excuse themselves from devoting the rest of their lives to exegesis. It is in spite of his prophecies and not because of them that Blake stands among the immortals.

Here is the bright and clear tune which forms the prelude to *Songs of Innocence* :—

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud, I saw a child,
And he, laughing, said to me :

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"
So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, pipe that song again!"
So I piped : he wept to hear.

Blake piped many "a song about a Lamb"; and his lamb was the Lamb of God. His poem

of the lion and the lamb, called *Night*, is one of the most strangely beautiful poems in any language. Again, the famous *Tiger, Tiger*, which seems at first to be merely a fiercely coloured, decorative picture of the great striped cat stealing through the jungle, proves to be the crying-out of a soul before the mystery of Good and Evil. In Blake's second version two of its verses run :—

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Framed thy fearful symmetry ?
When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see ?
Did he who made the lamb make thee ?

Indeed, it is the grandeur of Blake that he can make a few child-like words hold infinite and eternal meanings, even as a tiny dew-drop can reflect the whole orb of the sun. All—and much more than all—that Tennyson said in his oft-quoted “Flower in the crannied wall,” Blake had said already in the four lines :—

To see a world in a grain of sand,
A heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.

In another place he says, "One thought fills immensity"; and Eternity is ever present to his mind. Here, for example, is part of a letter which he wrote in middle life to the sculptor Flaxman :—

I am more famed in heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies and chambers filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life; and these works are the delight and study of archangels. Why then should I be anxious about the riches or fame of mortality?

Of his *Jerusalem* he said :—

It is the grandest poem the world contains. I can praise it because I am only a secretary. The authors are in eternity.

On some ears all this will grate as the almost blasphemous boasting of a madman. But Blake was speaking to a kindred soul and not to strangers and literalists. In a literal sense he no more meant that archangels were poring over his works than he meant to assert the existence of heavenly book-binderies when he blithely said of some poems which the publishers had rejected, "Never mind! They are published elsewhere, and beautifully bound." Those who shake their



THE REUNION OF SOUL AND BODY.
A Design by William Blake for Blair's "Grave."

heads and drop hints of Bedlam should take note of the cool and sane answer which Blake gave to some one who had taken his visions too literally. "You can see what I do if you choose," he said. "Work up imagination to the state of vision and the thing is done."

Most of his unworldly works were wrought in the midst of bricks and mortar, in bare rooms, and under pinching poverty. But for three years Blake, in his forties, was enabled to live under "a thatched roof of rusted gold" between the fields and the sea. Hayley, the poor-headed, good-hearted literary squire who was trying to double the parts of Maecenas and Horace, asked Blake to engrave the plates for his *Life of Cowper*, and very handsomely established the poet in a cottage near his own mansion at Felpham, close to Bognor. Both cottage and mansion still stand, and would be visited by thousands of Bognor day-trippers if it were not for the superior attractions of a beer-house entirely papered with penny stamps.

In due time, or much sooner, Hayley got upon Blake's nerves. It does not follow that the little man was necessarily wrong and the

great one necessarily right ; but in three years the ill-matched pair parted company. Blake returned to London and worked like a slave until, on 12th August, 1827, he who "could not think of death as more than the going out of one room into another" declared himself "happy, hoping for salvation through Jesus Christ," and died saying that he "was going to that country which he had all his life wished to see."

An enormous mass of Blake's unpublished drawings and MSS. fell into the hands of some Swedenborgians and Irvingites who made a bonfire of them all, on the ground that, although they were undeniably inspired, their inspiration was from the devil. Probably, however, the loss to the world, so far as the MSS. are concerned, was not great, as the writings appear to have belonged to Blake's "prophetic" period. Of his *Jerusalem* he had said :—

I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

Most of the golden strings, however, are tangled and knotted beyond unravelling ; and therefore

one may comfort one's heart for the lost MSS. by recalling this passage from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:—

The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me.

After dinner, I asked Isaiah to favour the world with his lost works. He said none of equal value was lost. Ezekiel said the same of his.

Further consolation lies in the fact that the prophetic books, so far as they are intelligible, contain sundry social doctrines which experience has shown to be poisonous. Blake preached these doctrines without practising them: but they are in danger of befogging his fame by drawing the wrong worshippers to his shrine. But in justice to Blake it must be remembered that he thought and wrote under the over-strong stimulus of the French Revolution, and that, while others talked, he was the only English *intellectuel* who actually walked the streets in the *bonnet rouge*. Much of his social iconoclasm may therefore have been accidental. As for his alleged theological novelties, like most lay dabbings in the first of sciences they turn out, on scrutiny, to be either revivals of outworn heresies or paradoxical statements of what

the most thoughtful Churchmen have always believed.

Blake's achievement as a painter-graver lies outside the scope of this book. But, without going into details, it must be added that his best designs are worthy to stand beside his best poems. From an every-day standpoint, he was ludicrously wrong in claiming to have painted as well as Raphael. Nevertheless there are connoisseurs who, rising above conventional art-criticism and the logic of the auction-room, would gladly give a minor Raphael or two for a picture so unexpected, so poetical, so tender, and so glorious as *The Nativity* of Blake. Yet hundreds of Blake's drawings are still lying unpublished, and the directors of the British national collections cheerfully give for an altar-piece by some second-rate Italian a sum which would buy two or three works from the hand of the most directly inspired artist England has ever produced.

ROBERT BURNS

CRITICISM of Robert Burns is beset by a difficulty. Fully to appreciate Burns one must be a Scot of Scots : but to be a Scot of Scots involves, so far as Burns is concerned, that one must cease to be a critic. The cold Englishman may try to take Burns to pieces, like an old watch, so as to find out how the wheels were made to go round : but a Scot of Scots would as soon consent to follow the Englishman's example as to preside at the vivisection of his own favourite dog.

The poems of Burns form, so to speak, the vast and varied national anthem of the Scottish race all over the world ; and, much as they may enjoy them, English readers rarely lose the feeling that they are intruders upon a family circle. Again, the strangeness of Burns' vernacular to the English ear and the English eye increases the English critic's diffidence. Nor is there

much clear light to be gained from the verdicts of English poets upon their Scottish brother. Here is a reminiscence of Aubrey de Vere :—

“‘Read the exquisite songs of Burns,’ Tennyson exclaimed. ‘In shape, each of them has the perfection of the berry, in light, the radiance of the dewdrop : you forget for its sake those stupid things, his serious pieces!’ The same day I met Wordsworth, and named Burns to him. Wordsworth praised him even more vehemently than Tennyson had done, as the great genius who had brought Poetry back to Nature; but ended, ‘Of course I refer to his serious efforts, such as *The Cotter’s Saturday Night*; those foolish little amatory songs of his one has to forget.’ I told the tale to Henry Taylor that evening; and his answer was, ‘Burns’ exquisite songs and Burns’ serious efforts are to me alike tedious, and disagreeable reading.’”

Robert Burns took his first breath of Scotland’s cauld blasts at Alloway, near Ayr, 25th January, 1759, eleven years before William Wordsworth, another outdoor poet of a different order, was ushered into an English home. He was the eldest son of William Burns or Burnes, a struggling farmer; and it was in the wake of the plough that this bird of the stubble and the grass carolled afterwards its sweetest lays.

His early years, though nipped by privation, were not unhappy. His father waged a continual battle with ill-fortune, but in the thick of the fight manifested all the Scottish peasant's carefulness for the education of his children. In 1766 he removed to the farm of Mount Oliphant, a few miles above the mouth of the River Doon. Robert and his brother Gilbert were placed under the tuition of a Mr. Murdoch. This young man boarded with the family, and for a small remuneration undertook to teach the sons of his host together with those of a few other farmers in the neighbourhood. Gilbert says :—

With Murdoch we learned to read English tolerably well, and to write a little. He taught us, too, the English grammar. I was too young to profit much by his lessons in grammar, but Robert made some proficiency in it, a circumstance of considerable weight in the unfolding of his genius and character ; as he soon became remarkable for the fluency and correctness of his expression, and read the few books that came in his way with much pleasure and improvement, for even then he was a reader when he could get a book.

“The fluency and correctness of his expression” was one of the marvels of Burns ; but

the gift was closer akin to nature than to lessons in English grammar. Dugald Stewart testifies that "the idea which his conversation conveyed of the powers of his mind exceeded, if possible, that which is suggested by his writings"; Robertson, the historian, said, he "scarcely ever met any man whose conversation displayed greater vigour"; the Duchess of Gordon declared that "he carried her off her feet"; and it is affirmed that when he came late to an inn the servants would get out of bed to hear him talk. Burns has left us a vivid picture of the hardships of his youth :—

The farm proved a ruinous bargain; and to clench the misfortune, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my tale of "Twa Dogs." My father was advanced in life when he married; I was the eldest of seven children, and he, worn out by early hardships, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was freedom in his lease in two years more, and to weather these two years, we retrenched our expenses. We lived very poorly: I was a dexterous ploughman for my age; and the next eldest to me was a brother who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash the corn. A novel-writer might, perhaps, have viewed

these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I; my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel factor's insolent threatening letters, which used to set us all in tears.

What the books were which aided in the development of the poet's mind, then, and afterwards at Lochlea, to which farm on the banks of the Ayr the family removed when he was in his seventeenth year, he himself has told us.

What I knew of ancient story was gathered from Salmon's and Guthrie's geographical grammars; and the ideas I had formed of modern manners, of literature, and criticism, I got from the *Spectator*. These, with Pope's Works, some plays of Shakespeare, Full and Dickson on Agriculture, the Pantheon, Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, Justice's *British Gardener's Directory*, Bayle's Lectures, Allan Ramsay's Works, Taylor's *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin*, *A Select Collection of English Songs*, and Hervey's *Meditations*, had formed the whole of my reading. The collection of songs was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic craft, such as it is. . . . The first two books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever

read since, were *The Life of Hannibal* and *The History of Sir William Wallace*. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bag-pipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.

For the quickening of his imagination and the cultivation within him of "the latent seeds of poetry," Burns reckoned that he owed much to the influence of an old woman who lived with the family, and who "had the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spun-kies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery."

Love-making and verse-writing, the chief recreations of his toilsome days, had for him a simultaneous birth, and he tells us how. In his fifteenth autumn he had for partner in the harvest field "a bewitching creature" a year younger than himself. He says:—

I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind



TAM O' SHANTER.
After A. Cooper, R.A.

with her, when returning in the evening from our labours ; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an *Æolian* harp ; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly ; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin ; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love ; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he ; for, excepting that he could smear sheep and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholarship than myself. Thus with me began love and poetry.

An unfortunate change in the life of Burns was his migration to Irvine when he was about twenty-two years of age, to learn flax-dressing. Not only did the venture prove disastrous financially, but he was thrown into company and formed friendships such as lowered his moral tone ever afterwards. Soon after his return the father died, his last hours perturbed by fears for the future of his son, of whom he had remarked prophetically years before, "Who-

ever lives to see it, something extraordinary will come from that boy."

Robert and his brother Gilbert now struggled to make a success of the farm they had rented at Mossgiel before their father's decease; but bad seed in the first and a late harvest in the second year baulked their endeavours. Poetry prospered more than farming. Some of the best work of Burns was produced at this period. *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, *Hallowe'en*, *The Jolly Beggars*, *Holy Willie's Prayer*, *To a Mouse*, and a number of other remarkable pieces were poured forth in rapid succession. The poet was now about twenty-five, and the desire to win literary renown for himself and his country glowed in his soul as his large dark eyes glowed in his face. "I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time," said Sir Walter Scott. "I had," wrote Burns afterwards,

E'en then, a wish, I mind its power,
A wish that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast,
That I for poor Auld Scotland's sake
Some usefu' plan or beuk could make,
Or sing a sang at least.

It was in the singing of songs that his gifts were to find most voluminous expression. He wrote some three hundred, and of these quite two-thirds are concerned with love-making. His Jeanies and Marys and Eppies, his Megs and Peggies and Nannies, keep the poet in a constant fever. He flits from one to another as vagrantly as a bee, sipping honey at every turn, and paying for the nectar with a song. "My heart," he writes, "was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other." After making the fullest allowance for his inflammable nature, the fickleness and shallowness of his affections must remain unadmirable. But none can blame him more than he blamed himself. It is pitiable to remember how much of his life was made up of sinning and repenting; yet one must not forget his words to the *Unco Guid or the Rigidly Righteous*:—

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us,
He knows each chord its various tone,
Each spring its various bias :
Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it ;
What's *done* we partly may compute,
But know not what's *resisted*.

It was out of this sinning and repenting that his melodies sprang, melodies which have captured the hearts of multitudes, and it is irrational to grow enthusiastic over their scent and colour and yet decry ungenerously the soil in which they grew. It is just to remember also that while Burns seized and refashioned the old songs of his country, he purified and exalted them in the process. Tennyson once remarked to Lecky that "Burns did for the old songs of Scotland almost what Shakespeare had done for the English drama that preceded him."

In 1786 Burns made arrangements to leave Scotland for Jamaica, where a situation had been promised him. The farm was unremunerative, his relations with Jean Armour, whom he subsequently married, were fruitful of shame and grief to both himself and her, and emigration seemed the likeliest way out of many difficulties. To raise funds his poems were published at Kilmarnock; but the publication brought him so much more than the sorely-needed money, such a waft of fame and popularity, that, instead of becoming an exile from his country, we find him spending the

winter in Edinburgh, courted by wealth and fashion and learning.

It seemed certain that this was the lucky hour of the poet's career, the dawn of a sunnier day. But it was only a gleam that darkened into night. Burns was made the pet and wonder of an Edinburgh season ; a second edition of his poems was subscribed for ; dinners and suppers were heaped upon him ; and then, with an indifference hard to understand and harder to excuse, he was left to face the stern fight of the future with scarcely a helping hand.

The farm at Ellisland on the banks of the Nith, leased and stocked out of the proceeds of his poems after Burns had generously given £180 to his brother Gilbert, proved a failure ; and as his resources diminished both his family and his cares increased. A post in the Excise was found for him ; but the toil it added to his already incessant labour was a heavy tax to pay for its additional £50 a year. After a struggle of three years at Ellisland, he was compelled to surrender the lease, dispose of his stock, and retire with his wife and children to a small house

in Dumfries, a change unfavourable to both his morals and his fortunes.

Tam O'Shanter, the most vigorous offspring of his muse, had been produced at Ellisland in the autumn of 1790. His wife found him one day reciting aloud, and with wild gesticulations :—

Now Tam ! O Tam ! had they been queans,
A' plump and strappin' in their teens.

“I wish ye had seen him,” she said ; “he was in such ecstasy that the tears were happing down his cheeks.”

After his removal to Dumfries he continued to pour out songs for a collection of national melodies then in course of formation by Mr. George Thomson, of Edinburgh. For these, with a generosity that does credit to his heart, but that hardly seems called for in such straitened circumstances, he declined all pay. “As to remuneration,” he wrote, “you may think my songs either above or below price ; for they shall be absolutely the one or the other.”

Among the poetical qualities of Burns none is more noteworthy than his spontaneity. His verse came as directly, inevitably, as the song of a



THE MAUSOLEUM OF BURNS, DUMFRIES.

After W. H. Bariletti.

bird ; never far-fetched, but always of that which met his eye and filled his heart. Even his longer poems were born in a breath, not hewn and chiselled into shape. And like his songs was his life : swift, vivid, wayward ; and when with broken wing he fluttered to the ground on 21st July, 1796, his death was of a piece with his work and with his life.

Burns is the poet of the fields. His songs carry us into the open-air, to saunter through the barley, to flirt with some pretty reaper amid the corn, to make friends with the mouse or the daisy. The scent of the hay is on his garments, the cry of living things in his speech. He is Scotland's lark, and were her grey skies cheated of his silvery notes, they would be robbed indeed. Her Walter Scott could declaim of castles and of knights, of stately dames and prowess on the tilted field ; but it was Burns who sang of the common folk, their homely accents, their fireside ways, their loves, their laughter, their tears—and these are the things that matter.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

IN our rationalistic age, it is thought old-fashioned and fanciful to speak of a poet as "inspired." Yet, if the word did not already exist, it would have to be invented. Some word or other is necessary by which to express the sudden up-soaring of a plodding minstrel from the flat and dusty earth into the larks' heaven. And the word "inspired" is not the worst that could have been chosen. When the voice of a deadly-dull drone suddenly rings out like a golden trumpet, one cannot help feeling that some bright power is possessing him and speaking through him. Wordsworth's is the great case in point. The difference between Wordsworth inspired and Wordsworth uninspired is greater than the famous difference between Philip drunk and Philip sober.

Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth in

Cumberland on 7th April, 1770, just outside that Lake Country which his poetry was destined to colour so brightly on the poetical map of the world. His father, John Wordsworth, was a lawyer, his mother the daughter of a mercer at Penrith. He describes himself as

Of a stiff, moody, violent temper; so much so that I remember going once into the attics of my grandfather's house at Penrith, upon some indignity having been put upon me, with an intention of destroying myself with one of the foils, which I knew were kept there. I took the foil in my hand, but my heart failed. Upon another occasion when I was at my grandfather's house at Penrith, along with my eldest brother, Richard, we were whipping tops together in the large drawing-room, on which the carpet was only laid down on particular occasions. The walls were hung round with family pictures, and I said to my brother, "Dare you strike your whip through that old lady's petticoat?" He replied, "No, I won't." "Then," said I, "here goes!" and I struck my lash through her hooped petticoat; for which, no doubt, though I have forgotten it, I was properly punished.

Of this rebellious, mischievous spirit, there is not much trace in Wordsworth's adult life. He himself taught that "The Child is father of the

Man"; but it is difficult to connect the reposeful poet of *The Prelude* with the boy who struck his whipcord through the pictures on the drawing-room wall. He describes his school days at Hawkshead as very happy, chiefly because he was left at liberty to read whatever he pleased. "I read," he says, "all Fielding's works, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and any part of Swift that I liked—*Gulliver's Travels* and *The Tale of a Tub* being both much to my taste."

It was from Nature, however, rather than from books that Wordsworth drew his deepest inspiration; and he has left us this record of his sensitiveness to the Presence which filled the vales and brooded over the hills :—

Ere I had told
Ten birthdays, when among the mountain slopes
Frost, and the breath of frosty wind, had snapped
The last autumnal crocus, 'twas my joy
With store of springes o'er my shoulder hung
To range the open heights where woodcocks run
Along the smooth green turf. Through half the night,
Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied
That anxious visitation;—moon and stars
Were shining o'er my head. I was alone,
And seemed to be a trouble to the peace
That dwelt among them. Sometimes it befell

In these night wanderings, that a strong desire
O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird
Which was the captive of another's toil
Became my prey ; and when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

He was wont as a boy to blow

Mimic hootings to the silent owls
That they might answer him ;

and then, sometimes in the silence,

While he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents ; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

The passion for ravaging the woods in quest
of nuts is common to all youths who know
where there is a nut-tree to be found ; but
seldom shall we find a boy who, among the
broken branches, feels that Nature has been
hurt like a living thing.

Then up I rose

And dragged to earth both branch and bough with crash
 And merciless ravage; and the shady nook
 Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
 Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
 Their quiet being, and, unless I now
 Confound my present feelings with the past,
 Ere from the mutilated bower I turned,
 Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
 I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
 The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky—
 Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
 In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
 Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.

Through the liberality of two uncles Wordsworth was sent to Cambridge in 1787 when he was seventeen years of age. He quitted it with his bachelor's degree in 1791. From his description of the life there one does not gather that it did over-much for him.

We sauntered, played, or rioted; we talked
 Unprofitable talk at morning hours;
 Drifted about along the streets and walks,
 Read lazily in trivial books, went forth
 To gallop through the country in blind zeal
 Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast
 Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars
 Come forth, perhaps without one quiet thought.

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Imagination slept,
And yet not utterly. I could not print
Ground where the grass had yielded to the steps
Of generations of illustrious men,
Unmoved. I could not always lightly pass
Through the same gateways, sleep where they had slept,
Wake where they had waked, range that inclosure old,
That garden of great intellects, undisturbed.

After Cambridge Wordsworth spent some months in London, and thence crossed over to France. The Revolution was at its height, and the young Englishman was not alone in believing that the Golden Age was at hand. To generous minds it was bliss merely to be alive in a time so magnificent with hope: while, in Wordsworth's own words, "to be young was heaven." The poet spent most of the year 1792 at Orléans and Blois, returning to Paris after the massacres of September. It is customary to describe Wordsworth's life as a life entirely without excitement, and to hint that Wordsworth himself was always a slow-coach: but he had more than "one crowded hour of glorious life," and, if his uncles had not cut off supplies, he would have taken an active part in French politics. His noble sonnets on Liberty

are full of the fiery joy and pride with which he hailed the day when all men should be fraternal and equal and free.

But the cold steel fell upon the neck of Louis XVI, and Wordsworth recoiled in dismay from the new Terror which outdid the far milder and less bloody tyranny which had been swept away. And when Liberty made way for a military despotism, he turned, sick at heart, to Nature for the solace and inspiration which he had hoped to find in the progress of the race. Nor was he ever thereafter unfaithful to his choice.

At home again in England, Wordsworth published two little books, or pamphlets, of undistinguished verse, in Pope's manner. A year or two later a young friend died and left him £900, thus enabling him to give himself up entirely to poetry. With his sister Dorothy he removed to Alfoxden, in Somerset, and became the neighbour of Coleridge.

Coleridge was enthusiastic in his brother-poet's praise. "The giant Wordsworth," he exclaimed, "God love him!" and "I feel myself a little man by his side." In her turn, Dorothy

Wordsworth wrote that Coleridge was "a wonderful man." A breeze sprang up when Dorothy began to borrow Mrs. Coleridge's shawls, without asking leave, in order to go for long walks with Mrs. Coleridge's husband: but, in the main, all was calm and bright.

Lyrical Ballads, one of the most influential books ever published, appeared anonymously in 1798. It was the joint production of Coleridge and Wordsworth, and was hatched out of a modest desire for £5. Although it contained *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* it made no immediate impression and the publisher lost his money. Immediately after the publication, Wordsworth and his sister started for Germany, where many of his best shorter poems were written. Among these are the stanzas to the mysterious "Lucy." It was Lucy's memory which wrung from Wordsworth the only outburst of lyrical passion in all his work:—

But she is in her grave; and oh
The difference to me!

On their return to England the brother and sister made their way to Grasmere. Here, first in a small cottage, now set apart as a memorial

of the poet, and afterwards at Rydal Mount, a somewhat better house, from which he could look down on Rydal Water, he remained for the rest of his days, wedded to those changeful glories of the weather concerning which he writes admiringly that they "will often tempt an inhabitant to congratulate himself on belonging to a country of mists and clouds and storms, and make him think of the blank sky of Egypt, and of the cærulean vacancy of Italy, as an unanimated and even a sad spectacle." The salary he received as Distributor of Stamps for Cumberland and Westmoreland, supplemented by two or three small legacies, enabled him to enjoy for over fifty years in this solitude that "plain living and high thinking," of which he was both preceptor and exemplar. Here is Dorothy Wordsworth's description of their first home at Grasmere :—

We are daily more delighted with Grasmere and its neighbourhood. Our walks are perpetually varied, and we are more fond of the mountains as our acquaintance with them increases. We have a boat upon the lake, and a small orchard and smaller garden, which, as it is the work of our own hands, we regard with pride and partiality. Our cottage is



RYDAL MOUNT : THE HOUSE OF WORDSWORTH.

After T. Creswick, R.A.

quite large enough for us, though very small; and we have made it neat and comfortable within doors; and it looks very nice on the outside; for though the roses and honeysuckles which we have planted against it are only of this year's growth, yet it is covered all over with green leaves and scarlet flowers; for we have trained scarlet beans upon threads, which are not only exceedingly beautiful but very useful, as their produce is immense. We have made a lodging-room of the parlour below stairs, which has a stone floor, therefore we have covered it all over with matting. We sit in a room above stairs, and we have one lodging-room with two single beds, a sort of lumber-room, and a small low unceiled room, which I have papered with newspapers, and in which we have put a small bed. Our servant is an old woman of sixty years of age, whom we took partly out of charity. She was very ignorant, very foolish, and very difficult to teach. But the goodness of her disposition, and the great convenience we should find if my perseverance was successful, induced me to go on.

To this sister Dorothy, Wordsworth was indebted in many ways. Of her he wrote :—

Mine eyes did ne'er
Fix on a lovely object, nor my mind
Take pleasure in the midst of happy thoughts,
But either She whom now I have, who now

GREAT ENGLISH POETS

Divides with me this loved abode, was there,
 Or not far off. Where'er my footsteps turned,
 Her voice was like a hidden Bird that sang,
 The thought of her was like a flash of light,
 Or an unseen companionship, a breath
 Of fragrance independent of the Wind.

It is of her also that he sings :—

The Blessing of my later years
 Was with me when a boy :
 She gave me eyes, she gave me ears ;
 And humble cares and delicate fears ;
 A heart, the fountain of sweet tears ;
 And love, and thought, and joy.

In 1802 the poet married Mary Hutchinson, of Penrith, a woman adapted in every way to share his thoughts and add to the quiet bliss of his life. She and Dorothy were the companions of his daily walks, the sharers of his reading and conversation, and each in the form of inspiration or criticism rendered him invaluable aid. The quality of Mrs. Wordsworth's mind may be inferred from the poet's statement that she was the author of those two fine lines in *The Daffodils* :—

They flash upon the inward eye
 Which is the bliss of solitude.

Of the genesis of that same ever-golden poem the sister's diary also affords us a pleasant glimpse :—

April 15, 1802. When we were in the woods below Gowbarrow Park we saw a few *daffodils* close to the water side. As we went along there were more, and yet more ; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw there was a long belt of them along the shore. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about them ; some rested their heads on the stones as on a pillow ; the rest tossed, and reeled, and danced, and seemed as if they verily danced with the wind, they looked so gay and glancing.

Quiet was the life spent by the poet in that fair country, and the quiet has passed into his work. His poetry is singularly free from the heat of passion ; never stirred by violent emotion. The strength of the mountain and the depth and translucency of the lake have passed into it ; much too of the steady simple life of the people. The shepherd, the beggar, the strolling tinker, the woodman, the leech-gatherer, the wagoner—these are the types on which Wordsworth loves to dwell. Into their homely cares, their unromantic toils and hopes he enters with the

sympathy of one who is above and yet ever with them, intent on showing how in primitive instinct and feeling they are one with the most highly born. But he does not present them as isolated beings for their simple human sake. He uses them as the greatest landscape-painters use the forms of short-statured, short-lived men in their foregrounds to bring out by contrast the hugeness of the everlasting hills. In Wordsworth Nature is not a background for Humanity, like painted scenery in a theatre: but Humanity is a foreground for Nature.

Professional criticism was slow to understand this new departure in poetry. Jeffrey, for example, began his notice of *The Excursion* in *The Edinburgh Review* with the words, "This will never do." Byron dubbed the same work "a drowsy, frowsy poem." But Wordsworth worked on until his greatness could not be concealed. Official recognition came in 1843, when he was made Poet-Laureate. As if to seal him with the Great Seal of the kings of English poetry, Death took him in 1850, on 23rd April—the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and of Shakespeare's death.



RYDAL WATER AND GRASMERE IN THE TIME OF WORDSWORTH.
After G. Pickering.

A lack of humour, and, by consequence, a lack of self-criticism, permitted Wordsworth to hand over to the printer many reams of writing for which the waste-paper basket had been a better place. Like his own Lake Country, his poems abound in barren wastes through which one must tramp wearifully to find "bits" and beauty-spots here and there. Several of the autobiographical passages, which have been quoted a few pages back, illustrate the frequent prosiness of his verse. Indeed, when modern poets are in playful mood they often amuse themselves by inventing such preposterous Wordsworthian lines as the well-known

A Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman.

But, when the tons of dross have been carted away, there remains a heavier weight of the finest gold than can be put to the credit of any other English poet save the greatest of all. At his inspired moments he was the equal of Shakespeare himself in splendid simplicity, as when he said of the Miltonic sonnet that "the thing became a trumpet." He was the occasional equal of Milton in magnificent eloquence,

as when he spoke of the ruined tower, which
wears royally its crown of weeds through the
storms of centuries

. . . and yet cannot sustain
Some casual shout that breaks the silent air,
Or the unimaginable touch of time.

He was, once or twice, the equal of Keats in
wistful reminiscence of the antique, as when he
wished

To hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

But, better than all these rivallings, he was
Wordsworth himself—Wordsworth who, al-
though he lived with his eyes fixed on every-
body's plains and hills and forests and waters,
saw them all in “the light that never was on
sea or land.”

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

THOSE who believe that thirteen is an unlucky number find more than a grain of support for their superstition in the case of "S. T. C." The author of *The Ancient Mariner* was the thirteenth child of the Rev. John Coleridge, vicar of Ottery St. Mary, in Devonshire ; and, from his birth on 21st October, 1772, to his death on 25th July, 1834, bad luck dogged him like his own shadow.

The vicar of Ottery St. Mary could not have been without learning ; for, on the ground that "Hebrew was the immediate language of the Holy Ghost," he was accustomed to edify his rustics by sprinkling his sermons with Hebrew quotations. And, if absence of mind implies the presence of the Muse, he may also have had the poetical temperament : for it is recorded of him that, having put on a clean shirt every day for half a week, his wife was puzzled as to the

whereabouts of the old ones until they were discovered, one over another, upon his person. But this kindly father and tutor died when his thirteenth child was only eight years old.

A presentation was obtained for the little orphan at Christ's Hospital, and he entered the school as a charity-boy one stuffy July. Among his school-mates was Charles Lamb, destined to be his friend for fifty years : but while Coleridge's school-days, unbroken by a single holiday at home, filled his mind with an extraordinary abundance of learning, they kept him heart-hungry and soul-sore. On certain holidays the boys were turned out of the school from early morning to sunset ; and in rainy weather those who had no friends in London would wander wretchedly about waiting for the gates to reopen. On one of these leave-days, the home-sick little Coleridge attempted to apprentice himself to a good-natured shoemaker, but merely got stormed at and knocked down by one of the schoolmasters for his pains.

Later on, he "became wild to be apprenticed to a surgeon." His brother Luke had come to London to walk the hospitals. "Oh ! the

bliss," he said, "if I was permitted to hold the plaisters!" But surgery could not charm him for long. Metaphysics and theology possessed him so completely that, in the streets, he would keep an eye open for any one "dressed in black" in the hope of finding by chance a philosophical auditor or antagonist. Last of all came the summons of Poetry. Providence often uses humble instruments: and it was *The Monody at Matlock* and kindred effusions by the Poet Bowles which wooed Coleridge into the literary life. At the time he was enjoying a delicious attack of calf-love for an admirable young milliner which doubtless prepared the Poet Bowles's way.

In due course Christ's Hospital sent forward its charity-boy to Jesus College, Cambridge, as a charity student. His bad luck went with him. Without delay a touting upholsterer called on the fresh and green undergraduate and asked him how he would like his rooms furnished. "Just as you please, sir," answered Coleridge respectfully, in the belief that he was speaking to one of the college officials. It is said that the wily townsman straightway involved his

customer in a debt of nearly £100. Coleridge quickly won the Browne gold medal for a Greek ode: but his money worries and the unpleasantness which arose out of his sympathy with Unitarianism and the French Revolution gradually made Cambridge intolerable. Before the Christmas of 1793 he ran away.

Throughout his life Coleridge clung affectionately to the appellation "S. T. C.," which had been given to him in the nursery. He loved to transmute it into Greek (Ἑσθησε); and in the epitaph which he composed for himself shortly before his death, he wrote:—

Stop, Christian passer-by! Stop, child of God,
And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod
A poet lies, or that which once seem'd he.—
O, lift one thought in prayer for S. T. C. ;
That he who many a year with toil of breath
Found death in life, may here find life in death !
Mercy for praise—to be forgiven for fame
He asked, and hoped through Christ,
Do thou the same.

Accordingly when the runaway, after spending a winter's night coiled up on a doorstep in Chancery Lane, enlisted in a regiment of dragoons, he preserved his beloved initials by

taking the name of Silas Titus Comberback. On his own confession he rode execrably and groomed his horse and himself vilely: nevertheless, he became a favourite in the regiment because he could write love-letters for the illiterate troopers and tend the sick in hospital. But learning, like murder, will out. One day Trooper Comberback scribbled on the white-washed wall beside his horse, "Eheu! quam infortunii miserrimum est fuisse felicem." An officer who saw the writing knew that it was Latin even if he could not translate it: and the end of the affair was Silas Titus Comberback's discharge from the army, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's return to Cambridge.

But Cambridge could not keep him. During the summer of the same year (1794), the poet ran against Southey, who was to become his brother-in-law; against Cottle, who afterwards published *Lyrical Ballads*; and against Sara Fricker, his destined bride. The young people were soon all drunk with a Utopian doctrine called "Pantisocracy." With hardly a £10 note between them, they planned the chartering of a ship which was to take themselves and some co-disciples

and a load of ploughs and harrows to found an ideal commonwealth or Earthly Paradise on the banks of the Susquehanna. On the strength of this wild-cat scheme, Coleridge broke with his University and quitted Cambridge without taking his degree.

When Pantisocracy ended in smoke, at first Coleridge appears to have thought that he was under no further obligations to his Pantisocratic Sara. But the sober Southey thought differently. He hunted the lagging lover out of the Angel Tavern in London and bore him off in triumph to Bristol, where Coleridge and Sara Fricker were married in October, 1795, at St. Mary's, Redcliffe, the church in which Chatterton had affected to find the MSS. of Rowley. Six weeks later Southey was married in the same church to Sara Fricker's sister Edith. Edith had the best of the four-sided bargain: for while Sara had captured by far the greater poet she had also burdened herself with by far the more impracticable bridegroom.

For a time the wedding-bells went on chiming sweetly. Coleridge carried his bride to a cottage near Clevedon—a white-washed, rose-hung place



ST. MARY REDCLIFFE, BRISTOL.

(IN THIS CHURCH COLERIDGE AND SOUTHEY WERE MARRIED : AND, IN ITS MUNIMENT ROOM, CHATTERTON PROFESSED TO FIND THE MS. REMAINS OF ROWLEY.)

(After J. Varley.)



VALETTA.

WHERE COLERIDGE LIVED AS SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNOR OF MALTA.

(After Samuel Prout.)

one story high. Cottle was paying him thirty guineas for a volume of poems, and he was earning a trifle by journalism as well. But the wolf was not far from the cottage door: and to chase it away, the young husband decided to issue a paper called *The Watchman*.

As with his second and equally disastrous journalistic venture *The Friend*, which Coleridge began in 1809, *The Watchman* was so planned as to invite failure. To evade the stamp-tax, the paper appeared every eighth day instead of every seventh, so that the subscribers received it one day later each week. By canvassing himself, the editor started with nearly a thousand subscribers: but they died off like flies in frost when they found themselves paying fourpence for such articles as an *Historical Sketch of the Manners and Religion of the Ancient Germans, introductory to a Sketch of the Manners, Religion, and Politics of present Germany*. With number ten *The Watchman* breathed its last.

Coleridge was twenty-three. Although he had failed of his ambitions as a cobbler and a surgeon, he had already been a dragoon, an editor, and, probably, a tutor. But more rôles

were in store for him. In 1796, the year which saw the birth and death of *The Watchman*, he issued his first volume of poems ; he became a proud father ; and he preached “in a blue-coat and a white waistcoat” at certain Unitarian chapels. Both poems and sermons were failures. The poems were practically ignored ; and the first sermon, which was on the Hair Powder Tax, drove most of its seventeen hearers to sleep, and the rest clean out of the chapel. As for the poet’s first-born son Hartley, he grew up into a brilliant failure and allowed intemperance to nullify half his gifts as a poet. More ill-luck attended Coleridge’s experiment, in this same year 1796, with a literary pupil or boarder. The boarder was an estimable young man : but it turned out that he was subject to fits. Even the advent of William and Dorothy Wordsworth brought bitters as well as sweets. The long walks and earnest talks of the two poets—both of them old friends of the Revolution—stirred up the authorities to “shadow” them by means of a spy ; and, worse still, the guileless Dorothy’s frequent strolls with her new friend nettled Mrs. Coleridge and even caused

her to gloat a little over the fact that the resultant *Lyrical Ballads* "were not liked at all by any."

By this time Coleridge had left Clevedon and had established his family at Nether Stowey. And, despite a hundred harassments and disappointments, it was during his residence at Nether Stowey that all the poetry by which Coleridge stands out as a truly great and amazing poet was written. His career as an author extends over forty years: but if the works dated 1797-8 were struck out of his writings, he would be remembered to-day, only by a few students, as a first-class critic who also wrote verses. It is true that one great composition—the second part of *Christabel*—is dated 1801: but there is little doubt that in writing it down the poet was lightening his brain of inventions which had clung to it ever since the first part of *Christabel* was written.

Coleridge himself believed that *Christabel*, which he never finished, was the finest of all his poems: and it is notorious that upon some minds *Christabel* produces an extraordinary effect. Shelley, for example, fainted away on hearing the lines

about "the shrunken serpent eyes" of the sorceress Geraldine. But ordinary readers, who lack Shelley's gift for swooning, mostly rank even the priceless fragments of *Christabel* far below the wholly splendid and amazing *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Indeed, there are many persons, of whom the writer of these pages confesses himself to be one, who treasure *The Ancient Mariner* not only as the best of the works of Coleridge, but also as the greatest single poem in the English language.

The Ancient Mariner was written for money. Coleridge, together with William and Dorothy Wordsworth, had need of £5 to pay the expenses of a little tour : and *The Ancient Mariner* was to be the two poets' joint work. But Wordsworth retired from the task : and the scheme was changed in favour of a joint volume of poems, which Cottle ultimately brought out as *Lyrical Ballads*. When *Lyrical Ballads* appeared, it contained only four pieces by Coleridge to nineteen by Wordsworth ; and of Coleridge's pieces three were short and unimportant. But the fourth was *The Ancient Mariner*.

Like the Wedding Guest who sat on a stone

and "listened like a three years' child," a born disciple of *The Ancient Mariner* "cannot choose but hear." Speaking through this poem, Coleridge still cries to every kindred spirit :

I pass like night from land to land ;
I have strange power of speech ;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me :
To him my tale I teach.

In no other poem can one find such pictures painted, such music played. When the Mariner reached the silent sea :—

All in a hot and copper sky
The bloody Sun at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.
Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion ;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.
Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink ;
Water, water, everywhere
Nor any drop to drink.
The very deep did rot : O Christ !
That ever this should be !
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

Upon the accursed ship thus becalmed there
bore down a phantom vessel : and

When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun,

the sun shone through the black barque's ribs :

As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face.

Death and a Woman were the phantom ship's
whole crew.

The naked hulk alongside came,
And the twain were casting dice,

Nothing more beautiful has ever been written
than the breaking of the spell after the Mariner
had vainly tried to pray for seven days and
seven nights, "with a heart as dry as dust,"
while his "four times fifty" dead comrades lay
round him, their dead eyes all wide open to
curse him. The moon was up : and

Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread ;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt away
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes :
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire :
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam ; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things ! no tongue
Their beauty might declare :
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware :
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray ;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

It is out of fashion nowadays for a critic to underline particular beauties of technique in a poem : but so vast has been the influence of *The Ancient Mariner* upon English prosody that its rhythmical wonders call for illustration. Coleridge took up the rude irregularities of the popular ballad-form and drew from them the

subtlest of mimetic effects. Notice the twittering abundance of syllables in this stanza :—

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the sky-lark sing ;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning !

And contrast it with the second line of

And now, all in my own countree
I stood on the firm land !

where the verse, after quavering like moonlit ripples, suddenly shrinks and hardens into a rock-like solidity.

It was in his *Ancient Mariner* year that Coleridge wrote the first part of *Christabel* and the magical dream-fragment beginning :—

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree :
Where Alph, the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

But the world did not want his poems. His tragedy *Osorio* lay unacted for ten years. To pay his way, Coleridge accepted a post as minister of a Unitarian chapel at Shrewsbury.

From this position, however, he was delivered by the brothers Wedgwood, sons of the famous potter, who made him an allowance of £150 a year. With the Wordsworths, Coleridge set out for Germany, where he mastered enough of the language to produce on his return a version of Schiller's *Wallenstein* so fine that Schiller himself did not disdain to improve his work by translating one of Coleridge's interpolations into German. But, commercially, the English *Wallenstein* was a dead failure.

Proposals were made to Coleridge about this time from the *Morning Post*, with hints of an eventual £2000 a year. But the poet wrote back that he "could not give up the country and the lazy reading of old folios for two thousand times two thousand pounds," and added, "beyond £350 a year, I consider money a real evil." Accordingly he followed Wordsworth's example and settled down in the Lake Country. His home was at Greta Hall in a fairy spot near Keswick. For two or three years he wrote hard. Then health failed. Partly as a belated punishment for the youthful folly of swimming the New River in his clothes and partly through

repeated drenchings in the rainiest corner of England, he was tortured by rheumatism and gout. Unhappily he heard of a quack remedy called "the Kendal Black Drop," which led on to so frightful a drug-habit that the poor slave would consume two quarts of laudanum a week and, at his worst, a whole quart in twenty-four hours.

It is better to hurry the pace of the heart-breaking story. The poor life went on darkening through a twilight of weakness and discouragement to a black midnight of shame and despair. For a time he was secretary to the Governor of Malta. Next, he drifted to Rome, breaking off all communication with his wife and friends, and leaving his family to subsist on the Wedgwood pension. Returning at last to England he drifted hither and thither until the breach with his wife was complete. His second journalistic venture *The Friend* was a ruinous failure. At last he was reduced to the ignominious routine of condensing reports for a London daily at a salary so small that he was forced to walk all the way from Fleet Street to Hammer-smith every night to save the nine shillings a

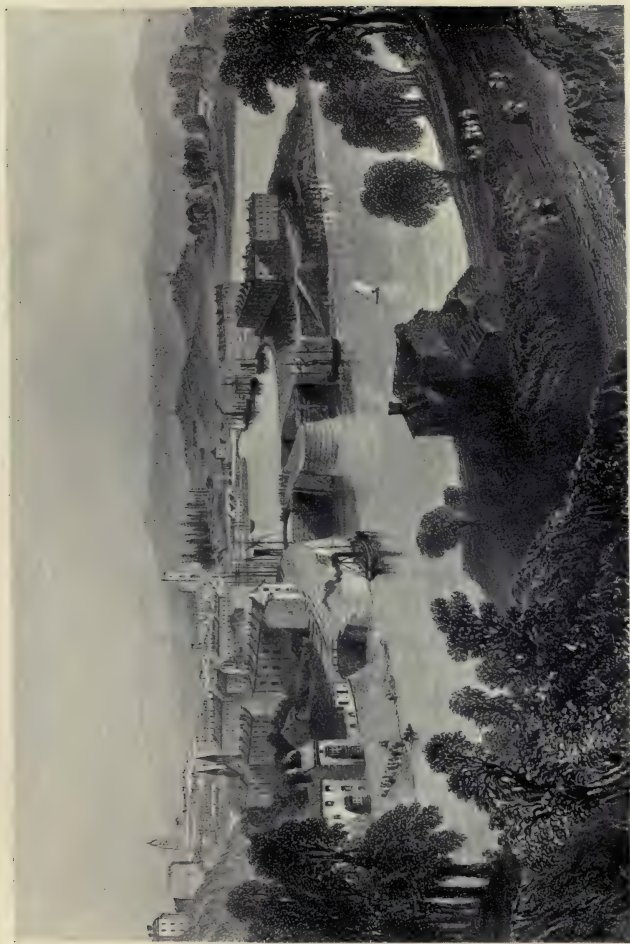
week which would have carried him by coach. And this was he who, according to De Quincey, was "the largest and most spacious intellect, the subtlest and most comprehensive, that has yet existed among men."

But at the age of forty-five he made a last desperate clutch at a floating plank and never afterwards let it go. Of his own motion he entered the house of Dr. Gillman, of Highgate. He himself gave the written order that he must not be permitted to leave the house without oversight, and that "delicately or indelicately" even the servants must assist in this coercion. De Quincey's doubts notwithstanding, Coleridge appears to have broken his chains and to have renounced opium. From Dr. Gillman's he published *Christabel*, *Biographia Literaria*, *Aids to Reflection*, and several smaller volumes. But ill-luck kept him company to the end. When at last he scored a popular success with *Zapolya*, of which two thousand copies were sold in six weeks, the publishers went bankrupt.

Coleridge died on 25th July, 1834. The last eighteen years of his life were all spent with the kindly Gillman. He recovered his self-respect ;

and though he was often hard put to it to find the fifty shillings a week for his board and lodging he did not disdain even the writing of school-books in order to pay his way. He had emerged from Unitarianism into the Old Theology, and much of his leisure went to a "great work" on Christianity as the true philosophy, which he bequeathed to the world as an oral tradition rather than as a formal writ.

Charles Lamb described the old poet as "an archangel—a little damaged." Carlyle, jealous perhaps of the man who had preceded and excelled him as a student and translator of German literature, dipped an ill-mended pen in vinegar and gall and wrote a patronizing and too famous account of Coleridge as mean of spirit as it is slovenly of letter. Nor was his fame helped by certain Scots who laboured hard to keep a great Englishman out of his own by calling *Christabel* "an impertinence" and *Biographia Literaria* "wild ravings," and by declaring that the public had accepted *The Ancient Mariner* like "a lying puff or a quack advertisement." As a result, most people think of Coleridge as a weakling and a failure from beginning to end. The truth is



OLD BRISTOL.
(After W. H. Bartlett.)

that this thirteenth child, this charity-boy, this despiser of money, this poet too great for his time, never had a full chance. It was pain, not a craving for unholy pleasure, which drove him to opium : and yet he triumphed over his habit when he was homeless and almost friendless and past his prime. But, in spite of opium, he was not a failure. He left behind him the most searching and sound expositions of poetry ever attempted by an Englishman. He plumbed new depths in Shakespeare. He was the generator of the best in Rossetti, and especially of *The Blessed Damozel*. He was the powerful publicist who, according to Fox, tore up the Treaty of Amiens. And he wrote *The Ancient Mariner*.

LORD BYRON

“**M**ADE in Germany” might almost be the label affixed to Byron’s reputation. And this is one of the cases in which the German manufacturers’ product is both cheap and nasty. Byron was imitated and idolized in Germany because of his cheap rhetoric and nasty ethics. Germans who were too ignorant of our language to distinguish between English poetry and English versifying hailed Byron for what he said, heedless of the way he said it : as if they were criticizing a reformer or a philosopher instead of a professing poet. Indeed, these Germans did not criticize Byron at all. To them he was a romantic figure who bowled them off their critical feet. The facts of his life thrilled them. Was he not a real milord ? Had not his predecessor in the title, “the wicked Lord Byron,” slain one Chaworth ; and had not

Byron himself made passionate love to Mary, the murdered Chaworth's beautiful daughter? Did he not live in a Gothic abbey—not a lath-and-plaster abbey, like Horace Walpole's, but an ancient pile, most appropriately ruined? Did not the women go mad over his curly head and adorable melancholy? Was he not as handsome and proud and wicked as Lucifer? And had he not swum the Hellespont, like a new Leander?

To the facts about Byron, Germany added a tinselled heap of half-truths and whole fictions. Germany believed that he had ploughed the seas as a corsair, that he had rescued Circassian beauties in distress, that he had slain an infidel with a scimitar, and that he had really and truly captured a Turkish island. Most welcome of all was the undeniable fact that Byron had slapped British prudery in the face. Unlike the timid innovators Wordsworth and Coleridge, who had been content to revolt from classical standards in poetry without throwing over the current religion and morality, the dashing young milord had boldly carried the Revolution, both by precept and example, into the moral and religious sphere. Byronic collars, Byronic curls, Byronic languors

became the only wear among the Sorrowful Werthers of the Fatherland. Germany believed, and to a large extent believes still, that the flashy Byron is the most considerable English poet since Shakespeare.

George Gordon Byron was not born a Lord or even an Honourable. His father, Captain John Byron, or "Mad Jack," was a worthless rake who took for his second wife Miss Catherine Gordon, a great heiress, of Gight, in Aberdeenshire. A rhyme of the day, which swiftly came true, asked :—

O whare are ye gaen, bonny Miss Gordon,
O whare are ye gaen, sae bonny and braw?
Ye've married, ye've married wi' Johnny Byron
To squander the lands of Gight awa'.

The father forsook his wife and child soon after the birth of the latter in Holles Street, Cavendish Square, London, on 22nd January, 1788, and, pressed by his creditors, fled to the Continent. He had a daughter, Augusta, by a previous marriage, who afterwards became Mrs. Leigh and the dearest friend of her half-brother, the poet. The mother, left now with only a scanty pittance of £150 a year, removed with

her child to Aberdeen. Here she was rejoined by her scapegrace of a husband, but their fiery tempers soon drove them apart, and for a while, though they lodged in the same street, it was at opposite ends. The father wished to have the child with him, but Mrs. Byron objected. The nurse, however, slyly suggested that one night's experience of the restless mite would probably be enough to satisfy paternal longings. So it proved. Next morning Captain Byron relinquished his charge without entreaty.

Stormy, self-willed, rebellious, was the little Byron, yet quick to respond to a touch of gentleness. Once, when reprimanded by his nurse for soiling his dress, he tore it in a moment from top to bottom, imitating instinctively the manner in which he had seen his angry mother rend her caps and gowns.

Untaught in youth my heart to tame,
My springs of life were poisoned.

His twisted leg and foot intensified this natural irritability. The poor child suffered a martyrdom through the efforts made by quacks and others to straighten his limb. "What a pretty boy Byron is," remarked a friend of his

nurse. "What a pity he should have such a leg." "Don't speak of it," cried the child, cutting at her with his whip, while his eyes flashed fire. This sensitiveness he carried to the end, and emphasized by it a defect that otherwise would hardly have been observed. His mother, in her reckless moods, was so lamentably lacking in sense and pity as to call him "a lame brat." Was it unnatural that when a school-fellow said to him, "Your mother is a fool," he should answer sadly and without remonstrance, "I know it"? A brighter glimpse is given us by Mr. Rogers, the private tutor with whom he read Virgil and Cicero. Once, when they were reading together, the tutor observed sympathetically, "It makes me uncomfortable, my lord, to see you sitting there in such pain as I know you must be suffering." "Never mind, Mr. Rogers," said the boy, "you shall not see any signs of it in me."

From boyhood he was vain of his rank, feeling it greater to be a lord than a poet. It is said that when he became heir to the title, and his name was read out in school with "Dominus" prefixed, he burst into tears. "We shall have

the pleasure some day of reading your speeches in the House of Commons," observed a friend, in a complimentary tone. "I hope not," answered the nine-year-old aristocrat. "If you read any speeches of mine, it will be in the House of Lords." He took his place in that august chamber in due course, but only addressed it three times, on each occasion, it may be remarked, in advocacy of justice and freedom.

One of the earliest samples of his poetic leanings is seen in some lines written about his eleventh year. A meddling old lady who believed that after death she would migrate to the lunar world, used to visit his mother. She offended him somehow; whereupon he cried out, "I cannot bear the sight of the witch," and wrote :—

In Nottingham county, there lives at Swan Green,
As curst an old lady as ever was seen,
And when she does die, which I hope will be soon,
She firmly believes she will go to the moon.

The first ten years of Byron's life were spent in Scotland, and he probably imbibed there his love of mountain scenery. But, after leaving it with his mother in 1798, he never returned; and when a lady suggested in after years that

there was a touch of northern accent in his speech, he exclaimed petulantly, with a brace of oaths, "I hope not. I would rather the whole country was sunk in the sea. I—the Scotch accent!" And yet he could write in *Hours of Idleness* :—

Years have rolled on, Loch na Garr, since I left you,
Years must elapse ere I tread you again :
Nature of verdure and flowers has bereft you,
Yet still are you dearer than Albion's plain :
England ! thy beauties are tame and domestic,
To one who has rov'd on the mountains afar :
Oh ! for the crags that are wild and majestic,
The steep frowning glories of dark Loch na Garr.

Of course these jingles are quoted here solely for their autobiographical interest. If Byron's writings, as poetry, did not often rise above this level he could have no proper place in a book on the great English poets.

In 1801 Byron was sent to Harrow, where he remained till 1805. He had previously spent two years in the boarding-school of Dr. Glennie at Dulwich, his mother doing much by injudicious treatment to spoil his disposition and hinder his progress. In one respect the school served him well, for Dr. Glennie writes : "In

my study he found many books open to him ; among others, a set of our poets from Chaucer to Churchill, which I am almost tempted to say he had more than once perused from beginning to end." At Harrow he worked fitfully, interspersing days of fervid industry with weeks of loitering indifference, yet gaining, nevertheless, a working acquaintance with the classics. He was then and afterwards an omnivorous reader. History and biography, philosophy, poetry, and divinity, and the works of such writers as Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Richardson, Mackenzie, Cervantes, Rabelais, and Rousseau were eagerly devoured. "I read eating," he says, "read in bed, read when no one else reads."

The high estimate he placed on rank found illustration in his intercession on behalf of Lord Delawarr. To the senior whose function it was to deal out punishment for offences, he said, "I find you have got Delawarr on your list ; pray don't lick him." "Why not ?" was asked. "Why, I don't know, except that he is a brother peer." But it is fair to remember along with this what he said to a lame youth whom he had taken under his protection : "Harness, if any

one bullies you, tell me, and I'll thrash him if I can," a pledge that was not left unfulfilled. This readiness to relieve and defend those in need characterized him all through life. He presented £1000, when he could ill spare it, to the Rev. Francis Hodgson, a college friend, to enable him to pay off debts that had come to him through inheritance, and Hodgson wrote enthusiastically: "Oh if you only knew the exultation of heart, aye, and of head too, I feel at being free from those depressing embarrassments, you would, as I do, bless my dearest friend and brother, Byron." This is far from being a solitary example of his beneficence. Leigh Hunt, with others, shared his bounty, and to Coleridge he gave £100 to help him out of straits, besides aiding him to find a publisher for *Christabel*. It is matter of history how he sacrificed time, money, health, and even life itself in the cause of Greek independence. In short, there are letters of gold as well as black blots in the recording angel's chronicle of Byron's headlong life.

The three years he spent at Trinity College, Cambridge, do not count for much, save in the



BYRON AT THE AGE OF NINETEEN.

After G. Saunders.

friendships Byron formed. A youth of seventeen, with his passions and training and an allowance of £500 a year and a servant, was not likely to stand up like a stone wall against the allurements of idleness and dissipation. Possibly he gained more from the river than from tutors, for he writes : "Though Cam is not a very translucent wave we used to dive for and pick up plates, eggs, and even shillings." Byron, despite his lameness, was an accomplished swimmer ; and it is well known how he and Lieutenant Ekenhead swam across the Hellespont from Sestos to Abydos, an achievement he refers to wittily in the lines :—

He could, perhaps, have passed the Hellespont,
As once (a feat on which ourselves we prided)
Leander, Mr. Ekenhead, and I did.

It was while he was at the University that *Hours of Idleness*, his first volume of poetry, appeared.

I, too, can scrawl, and once upon a time
I poured along the town a flood of rhyme,
A schoolboy freak, unworthy praise or blame ;
I printed—older children do the same.
'Tis pleasant, sure, to see one's name in print ;
A Book's a Book, altho' there's nothing in't.

The volume was generously received. Indeed, he remarked jestingly to a correspondent that his works were "praised by reviewers, admired by duchesses, and sold by every bookseller in the Metropolis." To this friendliness there was one exception. The *Edinburgh Review* hewed the book to pieces. Byron waited, "nursing his wrath to keep it warm"; then, in 1809, published a slashing rejoinder in verse, under the title of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. This production, brimming with wit and biting invective, though lacking frequently in critical insight, revealed the young poet as a power to be reckoned with. Soon after its publication Byron went abroad, giving the next two years to travel in Portugal, Spain, Malta, Albania, and eastward as far as Constantinople. He brought back with him the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*. These were published in 1812, and proved so popular that he was able to say, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous."

He was now twenty-four years of age, and the idol of society. During the next three years he poured out in rapid succession those romances in verse, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, and *The*

Corsair. The second of these was "thrown off in four nights." Of the third, ten thousand copies were sold on the day of publication.

Despite his public success, Byron's life was soon soured by private miseries. The fatal step was his hasty marriage with Anna Isabella Milbanke, only daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke. In affairs of the heart he was not a novice. At the age of ten he had fallen so wildly in love with his cousin, Mary Duff, that the news of her marriage almost threw him into convulsions. At eleven, his infatuation with another cousin, Margaret Parke, was so complete that he could neither eat nor sleep. Again, when a youth at Harrow, Byron's affections had been captured by Mary Anne Chaworth, heiress to the estates adjoining his own, and every attentive student of his life feels that this was the one passion that touched him to the quick, and to which his whole heart beat true. Mary Chaworth, after encouraging his attentions, married another, and the disappointment wove a strand of bitterness into all his after experience. Miss Milbanke was not the woman to quench his misanthropy or to wean him from his vices. She may have loved,

but was hardly of a nature large and flexible enough to understand him. He was proud, she self-poised ; she cool, he passionate ; he wild and she puritanical. He was hardly of the stuff out of which ideal husbands are made, but she must have known his quality before she accepted him. They were married on the second day of the year 1815, and on the fifteenth of the following January, only five weeks after the birth of a daughter, Lady Byron left home ostensibly to pay a visit, but returned no more. Why she so suddenly and completely broke with her husband remains a mystery. It is known that she had coldly asked him "When he meant to give up his bad habit of making verses"—a question which for ingeniously concentrated provocativeness, equals the familiar "Have you given up beating your grandmother?" But, amid a flow of conflicting reports, and without any sure word from the parties most nearly concerned, there can be no clear statement of reasons or accurate apportionment of blame. Byron certainly did not fail to blame himself, though at the same time he discussed the affair with an unpardonably large public in the lines :—

Though my many faults defaced me,
Could no other arm be found,
Than the one which once embraced me,
To inflict a cureless wound ?

Possibly he was not far from the truth when he added :—

Serenely purest of her sex that live,
But wanting one sweet weakness—to forgive ;
Too shocked at faults her soul can never know,
She deems that all could be like her below :
Foe to all vice, yet hardly Virtue's friend—
For Virtue pardons those she would amend.

Within a few months a legal separation was effected. But public opinion was against him ; and almost immediately afterwards Byron left England never to return. During the next nine years he resided abroad, at Geneva, Venice, Ravenna, Pisa, Genoa, frequently in company with Shelley, and with a new and more durable beloved, the Countess Guiccioli. But always, even amid the wildest dissipations, he went on pouring out a stream of verse. In December, 1823, he sailed for Missolonghi to share in the struggle for the liberation of Greece. It is noteworthy that certain Greeks hinted at making Byron their king, and that he replied : “ If they

make me the offer, perhaps I will not reject it." At Missolonghi, which he describes as a "mud basket," he was placed in command of a horde of turbulent recruits, and won universal praise for his vigour and brave endurance of hardship ; but unfortunately, before anything decisive could be effected, he was seized with fever, and died on 19th April, 1824, at the age of thirty-six.

The poetry of Byron swept Europe like a flood—fresh, bold, tumultuous, and not without its mire. But, like a flood, its sound and fury soon abated. Yet it cannot be truly said that the stream has run quite dry. Something remains.

He was not a melodist but a tune-monger ; and his thin and heady ditties fall upon a sensitive ear pretty much as a music-hall song falls on the ear of a man who has just emerged from a performance of *Die Walküre*. Nevertheless his fluent untortured verse supplied one more dose of the corrective which needs to be prescribed time after time against an excess of gravity in English poetry. Byron's thought is negligible : but, as a social satirist in cleverly



BYRON CONTEMPLATING ROME.
After W. Westall, R.A.

turned stanzas, he has penned some pages that will endure ; also he has given lasting expression to world-weariness and to romantic melancholy. English readers who care to whet their appetites by reading his admirable letters and the variegated records of his life will be able to read a great part of his poetry : while students of European literary history in general will always be forced to treat of him at large. He will never be a poet without honour save, perhaps, in his own country.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

LIKE Byron, Shelley was of aristocratic birth. Like Byron, Shelley had a beautiful face and curling hair. Like Byron, Shelley rushed into a mad marriage and speedily rushed out again. Like Byron, Shelley outraged the British public in politics, in religion, in morality. Like Byron, Shelley found his happiest home and wrote his best work in Italy. Like Byron, Shelley was a headlong and too prolific writer. Like Byron, Shelley died prematurely and in tragic circumstances. But, unlike Byron, Shelley was a great poet. For a time Byron must be included in books on the great English poets because greatness has been thrust upon him : but Shelley claims his place as of right because his greatness was born in him. Byron threw off volume after volume sure of applause and reward from all Europe : but Shelley, amidst

almost universal indifference or contempt, sang simply because the song would out.

Turning from Shelley the poet to Shelley the man, one finds one's ears deafened by conflicting voices. According to some, he was a callous and worthless libertine, obeying no laws save his impulses and desires. According to others, he was a strayed angel, or a child of nature, wonderingly tearing his raiment and wounding his hands and feet among the hedges and barbed fences of moral customs which were alien to his simple soul. He hovers between heaven and earth like a phantom, and will not be explained. "Mad Shelley," as he was called at school, would peer into the faces of the babes he met in the streets, eager to capture traces of the wisdom brought with them out of a previous life. To peer into the riddle of Shelley himself is equally irresistible; and it yields an equally contradictory result.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born at Field Place, near Horsham, on 4th August, 1792. His father, Timothy Shelley, was a conventional country squire of an ancient family, with a mind that never by any chance strayed beyond the sports

and duties of his station. His mother bestowed on him her beauty, but seems to have been chary of any further benefaction. Of literary outflowing in the garden of his ancestry there is no record.

This girlish-looking youth, with blue eyes, now luminous, now mistily dreamful, curling brown hair speedily turning grey, rosy complexion and gentle but excitable temperament, found himself at ten years of age dropped suddenly into the midst of fifty other boys at Sion House School, Isleworth, to learn from the tyranny of elder lads how rough a garb even at the beginning, life can wear, particularly to the one whose shyness withdraws instinctively from its unfriendly touch.

A fresh May-dawn it was,
When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,
And wept, I knew not why ; until there rose
From the near school-room, voices, that, alas !
Were but one echo from a world of woes—
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.

One youth stood out nobly from the rest, and though Shelley never met him in after years, he thought of him always as having been to him-

self and ready to be to others, "a covert from the storm, a hiding-place from the tempest." He said :

The tones of his voice were so soft and winning, that every word pierced into my heart; and their pathos was so deep, that in listening to him the tears have involuntarily gushed from my eyes. Such was the being for whom I first experienced the sacred sentiments of friendship.

Here, too, not only did Friendship first stir his breast, but Science showed him that romantic side of her being in which she is akin to poesy. For years afterwards, both at Eton and at Oxford, he sought by curious experiments to augment his scientific knowledge. At Eton he advanced in classical attainments, devoured Lucretius and Pliny, and waxed enthusiastic over Godwin's "Political Justice." Before leaving school he wrote two extravagant romances, *Zastrozzi* and *The Rosicrucian*, and shared in the composition of a poem on *The Wandering Jew*, and a volume of *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*, which was lost until a few years ago. Also he survived an episode of boyish passion for his cousin, Harriet Grove.

At University College, Oxford, where he remained only from the Michaelmas term, 1810, to March, 1811, his visionary ambition to mend the world or make a new one at a stroke found expression in the shape of a pamphlet entitled, *The Necessity of Atheism*. This invention of which necessity was not the mother, entailed upon him no lighter penalty than expulsion from the University, a fate shared by the friend whom he had found there, and to whom we are indebted for admirable sketches of the poet's life, Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Both were expelled, not expressly for writing the pamphlet, but for rebelliously declining to deny that they had done so when interrogated by the authorities. In view of this event and of the subsequent denunciations to which Shelley was subjected, it may be well to quote the words of one of his biographers, John Addington Symonds :

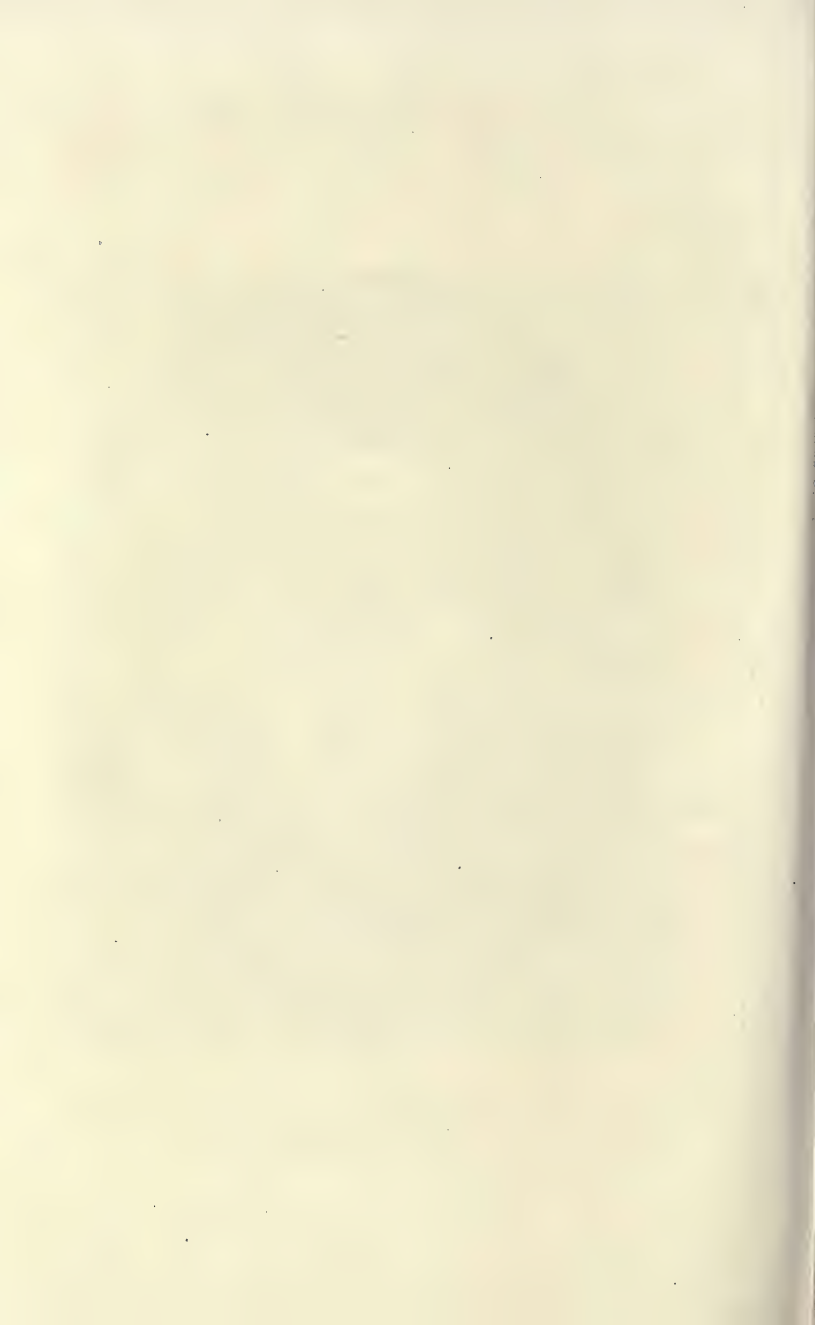
He had a vital faith ; and this faith made the ideals he conceived seem possible—faith in the duty and desirability of overthrowing idols ; faith in the gospel of liberty, fraternity, equality ; faith in the divine beauty of nature ; faith in a love that rules the universe ; faith in the perfectibility of man ; faith in the omnipresent soul, whereof our souls are atoms ; faith



Photograph W. A. Mansell.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

After Amelia Curran.



in affection as the ruling and co-ordinating substance of morality. The man who lived by this faith was in no vulgar sense of the word an Atheist.

Shelley felt and declared, doubtless with too great a vehemency and disregard for the feelings of others, that the prevailing views of a Divine Ruler of the universe were inadequate and often unworthy; only in this sense could he be proclaimed an Atheist.

The two friends made their way to London, and in a few months we find Shelley entangled with a pretty schoolgirl, Harriet Westbrook, and eventually eloping with her to Scotland, not impelled by an unlawful passion, but apparently by a chivalrous desire to rescue her from the persecutions of her family. She had imbibed Shelley's opinions, represented herself as suffering on account of them, and solicited his intervention. They were married in Edinburgh—she only sixteen, and he but three years older—tying a knot with their tongues which in a little while they would gladly have gnawed asunder with their teeth. For a season the light danced around them, and first at Edinburgh, then at York, then at Keswick, then at

Dublin, then at Nantgwilt, then at Lynmouth, then at Tremadoc, then in London, they played with life, enjoying the game ; Harriet reading aloud, distributing political tracts, studying Latin, leaving household cares to her mother-sister, Eliza, who kept their common stock of money "for safety in some nook or corner of her dress" ; Shelley busying himself with schemes for bringing prosperity into Ireland and shutting the sea out of Wales, corresponding with Godwin, writing *Queen Mab*, abjuring animal food and alcohol, living on bread and water and buns, or when something more substantial was brought him, leaving it untasted on a bookshelf for hours, and asking with the innocence of a child at the close of the day, "Have I dined?"

So far we have the strayed angel indeed, and one who, in the Old Testament phrase, needed but a morsel of bread to comfort his heart. But the angel life is for Paradise, and Paradise is not yet here, or here only with a serpent in the grass. The two so loosely knit together gradually drifted apart ; and no outsider is able to decide whether Eliza, or Harriet, or Shelley, or Circumstance was most to blame.

In the next scene, Mary Godwin, daughter of the author of *Political Justice*, fair-haired, pale, and with a piercing look, has caught the poet's heart in her strong grasp. "Nothing," says his friend Peacock, "that I ever read in tale or history could present a more striking image of a sudden, violent, irresistible, uncontrollable passion than that under which I found him labouring, when, at his request, I went up from the country to call on him in London." Henceforth Harriet was left to herself, with a comfortable allowance, while Shelley and Mary Godwin set up house together. Their affection endured and they married after Harriet's death. Harriet lived only two years after the desertion. Her body was found in the Serpentine in November, 1816, five years after the runaway marriage. That Shelley acted madly when he linked his life to this excitable school-girl few will deny; that he acted nobly when he turned away from her and took another, some have not hesitated to affirm. On the one hand, he has been called an inhuman fiend who put his revolutionary and atheistical theories so frightfully into practice that he became his

girl-wife's murderer. On the other hand, he has been justified on the Ibsenite ground that an individual must "realize himself" and "live his life" even if he has to defy society and break others' hearts in the process. Probably the truth lies between the extremes. Shelley was neither pioneer nor devil. He was still a boy ; and he weakly allowed himself to be swept along by sudden passion. Perhaps the chief shame of the affair is that Harriet's two tiny children did not hold their father to her side. They dragged like anchors in a typhoon. But, as father if not as husband, Shelley was punished with a punishment under which his heart ached to the end. The Court of Chancery decided that the two children born to him by Harriet should be withdrawn from his care, and that he should only see them now and then. In the greater moralities, based as they are on the sanctities of fatherhood and motherhood, even poets are not a privileged class ; and, as Shelley sowed, so had he to reap.

Yet is it ever to be remembered that this erring Shelley, according to the testimony of those who knew him best, was one of the most

generous and self-denying of men, ever ready to aid those in distress, impatient of coarseness in word or thought, scornful of indulgences for himself, indefatigable in visiting and relieving the poor. A story is told of his finding a poor woman ill on Hampstead Heath, and bearing her from door to door in search of shelter and aid. Byron, who spent much time with him abroad, said :

He was the most gentle, the most amiable, and least worldly-minded person I ever met ; full of delicacy, disinterested beyond all other men, and possessing a degree of genius joined to simplicity as rare as it is admirable.

The next scene in Shelley's short life-drama is laid across the sea. After a year spent at Marlow, during which year he wrote *Laon and Cythna*, afterwards called *The Revolt of Islam*, and began *Prince Athanase* and *Rosalind and Helen*, threatenings of consumption impelled him to seek refuge in Italy. He left England in the spring of 1818, and after sundry changes of residence, settled ultimately at Pisa. Here much of Shelley's best known work was achieved, including *Julian and Maddalo*, the *Ode to a Sky-*

lark, *The Sensitive Plant*, *The Witch of Atlas*, *Epipsychidion*, and *Adonais*, the latter breaking from him on hearing of the death of Keats, and under the impression that the young poet's career had been shortened by an unworthy review in the *Quarterly*. *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci* had been written previously, the former at Rome, the latter at Leghorn.

In Italy the poet's health improved, and at Pisa life sped pleasantly in association with the sympathetic friends he found in Mr. and Mrs. Williams and Captain Edward John Trelawny. How his days were spent, Trelawny describes thus :

He was up at six or seven, reading Plato, Sophocles, or Spinoza, with the accompaniment of a hunch of dry bread; then he joined Williams in a sail on the Arno, in a flat-bottomed skiff, book in hand, and from thence he went to the pine-forest or some out-of-the-way place. When the birds went to roost he returned home, and talked and read till midnight.

The same lively pen gives us a vivid picture of the birth of one of his lyrics, *Ariel*, to *Miranda take*. The poet was alone in the pine woods according to his wont.

Oh ! there are spirits in the air,
And genii of the evening breeze,
And gentle ghosts, with eyes as fair
As star-beams among twilight trees :—
Such lovely ministers to meet
Oft hast thou turned from men thy lonely feet.

Trelawny, stumbling across him, took the manuscript from his hand—

It was a frightful scrawl ; words smeared out with his finger, and one upon the other, over and over in tiers, and all run together in most “admired disorder” ; it might have been taken for a sketch of a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks ; such a dashed-off daub as self-conceited artists mistake for a manifestation of genius. On my observing this to him, he answered, “ When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the morning, when cooled down, out of the rude sketch as you justly call it, I shall attempt a drawing.”

In describing the magic qualities of a guitar in this same lyric, Shelley gives us unwittingly a charming delineation of his own poetic gift :

For it had learnt all harmonies
Of the plains and of the skies,
Of the forests and the mountains,
Of the many-voicéd fountains ;

GREAT ENGLISH POETS

The clearest echoes of the hills,
The softest notes of falling rills,
The melodies of birds and bees,
The murmuring of summer seas,
And pattering rain, and breathing dew,
And airs of evening ; and it knew
That seldom-heard mysterious sound,
Which, driven on its diurnal round,
As it floats through boundless day,
Our world enkindles on its way.

In May, 1822, Shelley and his friends rented a villa in the bay of Lerici, a smaller inlet within the bay of Spezzia. According to his wife :

His days were chiefly spent on the water ; the management of his boat, its alterations and improvements, were his principal occupation. At night, when the unclouded moon shone on the calm sea, he often went alone in his little shallop to the rocky caves that bordered it, and, sitting beneath their shelter, wrote *The Triumph of Life*, the last of his productions.

His health was good, he had attained to fuller command of his powers, and works of surpassing excellence, both in poetry and prose, might have been expected of his pen ; but the fates had willed otherwise.

On 8th July, he and Williams returned from Pisa, whither they had gone to meet Leigh

Hunt, with whom they had spent a pleasant week. The last seen of them alive was when, with a sailor boy, Charles Vivian, they started in their sailing-boat to cross the bay. It was a sultry afternoon, and a mist soon blotted them from sight. Then swept across the waters a roaring tempest. It only lasted twenty minutes, but when it passed all trace of the poet and his companions had vanished. Now followed a week of dreadful suspense for the women at Villa Magni, and for Trelawny left at Leghorn. On 18th July the bodies were washed up on the shore. In one pocket of Shelley's jacket was found his copy of *Sophocles*, and in the other Keats's poems, "doubled back," says Trelawny, "as if the reader, in the act of reading, had hastily thrust it away."

Shelley's body was cremated on the shore of the bay in the presence of Byron and Leigh Hunt, and the ashes were deposited in the Protestant cemetery at Rome. His heart, which refused to take the flame, was entrusted first to Leigh Hunt, and afterwards to Mrs. Shelley, and is now at Boscombe.

The proof of Shelley's poetry is in the read-

ing : and he must be read in bulk rather than in samples. Ignored in his lifetime and somewhat over-praised fifty years after his death, at the opening of the twentieth century his fame has suffered from an excessive reaction. Upon the poets who have followed him his influence has been small ; and there are otherwise good judges of poetry who can peruse his works without becoming convinced of his greatness. But, at his best, and especially in his lyrical and rhapsodical moments, he is very great indeed. He soars up as eagerly as a bird and sings as radiantly ; and in and out of his dustiest and dullest pages his spirit is forever appearing and evanishing like a white flame.

JOHN KEATS

“**I** THINK I shall be among the English Poets after my death.” So wrote Keats to his publishers in 1818, soon after *Blackwood's Magazine* had disgraced itself by telling “Johnny Keats” to go “back to the shop and stick to plaisters, pills, and ointment boxes.” Death made haste to take up the youth’s challenge ; and within three years Keats dictated from his last couch in Rome the epitaph “Here lies one whose name was writ in water.” He died at twenty-five—an age at which Shakespeare had not penned a serious line. Yet it was the prophecy of 1818 that came true : and the epitaph of 1821, which was breathed in humility and resignation rather than in bitterness and revolt, will itself outlast nearly all the names that are writ in brass on tables of stone. Keats is “among the English Poets.”

One might almost say that he was not merely a Poet but that he was Poetry. It was Keats who wrote :—

I find I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry—half the day will not do—the whole of it.

Spenser, “the Poets’ Poet,” first fired Keats with the desire to write : and it is not too much to say that for the last two years of his life he almost ceased to belong to the common world and became all Poetry and Love.

To plod through the chronicles of this unearthly life, registering the dates of the poet’s comings and goings, the names of the men and women he knew, the towns and houses he lived in, and the intrigues of knaves or fools who are best forgotten, would be to write of Keats in an un-Keats-like and misleading way. To some extent this is true of every exquisite and romantic poet. But it is doubly true of the poets of the nineteenth century and trebly true of Keats. In a playful fragment called *Modern Love* he himself expressed the feeling of incongruity with which we find that some dulcet singer of old-world loves is a person like ourselves, wearing clothes as ugly as our



JOHN KEATS.
After William Hilton, R.A.



own, and riding for twopence in the same underground trains. After the ironical lines

Then Cleopatra lives at number seven,
And Antony resides in Brunswick Square,

Keats bursts out :—

Fools ! make me whole again that weighty pearl
The Queen of Egypt melted, and I'll say
That ye may love in spite of beaver hats.

Of course one may love as truly in a beaver hat as in a casque of bronze, or a jewelled tiara, or with vine-leaves in one's unbound tresses. But, so far as the spectators are concerned, the beaver hat is a disability, and, since the passing of knee-breeches, it is the same with poetry as with love. In *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *Isabella* and *Lamia* and *Endymion* and *The Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *Hyperion*, Keats was writing about the Middle Ages and the Grecian sense of beauty and the primeval wars of the Titans ; and a too full picture of his late Georgian circumstances could therefore suggest only oddity and a lack of touch with warm and real life. Accordingly, only the major facts about Keats will be set down here.

In the eyes of the scholars and gentlemen who were encouraged to use *Blackwood's* for the damning of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Leigh Hunt, Shelley, and Keats, one of Keats' prime offences was his being a Cockney. But so were Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Pope, Blake. He first saw daylight on 31st October, 1795, at the "Swan-and-Hoop" in the City. That he was born in a stable will not be reckoned to his dishonour by Christian men. Thomas Keats, the father, was from the West of England. He had married his employer's daughter, Frances Jennings; and, as the livery stables paid well, John Keats eventually came into legacies which enabled him to throw up medicine and surgery and to devote himself, though not without occasional worries, to poetry.

But Poetry was in no hurry to call Keats into her service. Until *The Faerie Queen* roused him up at the age of fifteen, he did not scribble verses. On the contrary, he was loved and feared at school as a boy who cared little for books, but would "fight any one—morning, noon, and night, his brother among the rest. Fighting was meat and drink to him." This and the kindred fact

that at Guy's Hospital he successfully performed several operations, including the opening of a man's temporal artery, are not noted here, however, in a spirit of mere gossip. On the strength of the mis-statement implied in the well-known lines

Who killed John Keats ?
"I," said *The Quarterly*,

many people have formed that belief that "Johnny Keats" was a whimpering weakling who crawled into a quiet place and died because the great big critics were unkind to him. Schoolboys who felt the power of his right arm and sufferers who shrank under the calm skill of his lancet could have told a different tale.

Left fatherless at the age of eight, and motherless seven years later, John Keats was not sent by his guardian to a university. Like Blake, he was bound apprentice before he completed his fifteenth year. But while Blake, as the pupil of an engraver, was kept in touch with the things of art, Keats, as a surgeon's assistant, had to move in a world of gruesome reality. Whether he lost or gained by missing his Oxford or

his Cambridge is a question which has been abundantly argued from both sides. But one can say confidently no more than this : that the author of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* never learned Greek either in school or out of it : that he found Homer through Chapman ; that his knowledge of Grecian lore was gained from a "pantheon" and a classical dictionary : and that Keats, either in spite of, or because of, his ignorance, succeeded in revivifying more of the old Grecian world than all the learned Cambridge poets put together. But to call Keats himself, as some have done, "a Greek" is a mistake. He sang the life of the old world so well because he was neither in it nor of it. He was a looker-on, seeing the best of the game. In short, to use the jargon of criticism, he was an English romanticist extemporizing on classical themes.

One afternoon Cowden Clarke read Spenser's *Epithalamium* to the eighteen-year-old medical student and also lent him *The Faërie Queen* to take home. According to Cowden Clarke, the youth went "ramping with delight" through Spenser's faërie-land. One of Spenser's phrases, "the sea-shouldering whales," had such an effect

upon him that he seemed to hoist himself up and to imitate the leviathan's monstrous motion. For a year or two more he worked on at medicine and surgery : but Spenser had called and, in due time, his heir and successor obeyed.

Keats' first volume was published in 1817. Its contents are often set aside as affected and stiff. Yet they contain the lines about the moon :—

. . . lifting her silver rim
Above a cloud, and with a gradual swim
Coming into the blue with all her light.

They contain also the picture of the swan who “oar'd himself along” while “his feet did show beneath the waves like Afric's ebony.” Best of all, they contain the glorious line :—

Here are sweet peas, on tip-toe for a flight.

This first volume, as the word goes, failed. But Keats worked on, and the following summer he published *Endymion*, of which everybody knows the opening and most Keats-like line :—

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

From *Endymion* he went straight forward to the much finer *Isabella : or the Pot of Basil*, which

contains this undying indictment of capitalist greed :—

With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,
Enrichéd from ancestral merchandise,
And for them many a weary hand did swelt
In torchéd mines and noisy factories,
And many once proud-quiver'd loins did melt
In blood from stinging whip ; with hollow eyes,
Many all day in dazzling river stood,
To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood.
For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
And went all naked to the hungry shark ;
For them his ears gush'd blood ; for them in death
The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
Lay full of darts ; for them alone did seethe
A thousand men in troubles wide and dark.

But while his *Isabella* year advanced Keats into line with the foremost poets of all lands and all ages, it also sowed in his frame the seeds of early death. Consumption was in the family : and no good came of a spring journey to Devonshire, which he described thus :—

You may say what you will of Devonshire : the truth is it is a splashy, rainy, misty, snowy, foggy, haily, floody, muddy, slipshod county. The hills are very beautiful, when you get a sight of 'em ; the primroses are out,—but then you are in. . . . I think it well for the honour of Britain that Julius Cæsar did not first land in this county.

The spring in Devonshire was followed by a summer in Scotland, where Keats dealt a fatal blow to what he called "Jack Health" by climbing Ben Nevis in a mist. He returned to London with only thirty months to live. But into eighteen of these last months he crowded *Hyperion*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Lamia*, the play *Otho*, and many other works including his finest odes. These were the months in which he proved himself as poetical as Spenser, with a poeticalness which even excels Spenser's inasmuch as it appeals to everybody with a sense of poetry and not chiefly to actual or potential poets. Keats carried out his own teaching as to "loading every rift of the subject with ore," and he practised as well as preached the doctrine that "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess." Yet his bejewelled verse flies as swiftly as an Arab horse bravely caparisoned: unlike the verses of too many of his imitators, which lumber along like elephants over-burdened with gaudy loads of gilded trash. No poet has surpassed the greater odes of Keats for combined ease and richness. For example, after he has cried out to the nightingale "Thou wast not born for death, immortal

bird," he passes straight from an outcry to a reverie in the famous lines about :—

. . . the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.

Again, *The Eve of St. Agnes* is a gallery hung from end to end with swiftly and firmly painted pictures, such as "the owl for all her feathers was a-cold"; "the honey'd middle of the night"; "the music yearning like a God in pain"; and

. . . soon up aloft,
The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide :
The level chambers, ready with their pride,
Were glowing to receive a thousand guests :
The carvéd angels, ever eager-eyed,
Stared, where upon their heads the cornice rests,
With hair blown back and wings put crosswise on
their breasts.

Again :—

In all the house was heard no human sound.
A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door ;
The arras, rich with horsemen, hawk and hound,
Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar ;
And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

Keats' *Isabella* year was also the year of his meeting with Fanny Brawne, a blonde young creature who lived in moderate comfort with her widowed mother near to the poet's haunts in Hampstead. As unprecocious in love as he had been in poetry, Keats found at first that Miss Brawne's presence irritated him. He had already written :—

The generality of women appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar-plum than my time.

But Miss Brawne's blooming cheeks and pretty hair and grey-blue eyes and high spirits broke him down : and he fell in love so immeasurably that, after their betrothal, Keats had to force himself into exile at Winchester because the alternate pangs and raptures of his passion were unmanning him. His friend Dilke said :—

It is quite a settled thing between John Keats and Miss Brawne, God help them. It's a bad thing for them. . . . He don't like anyone to look at her or speak to her.

For four months the lover contrived to endure his self-banishment. Then he returned to London, intent upon earning money by journal-

ism. He took lodgings in Westminster, so that a few miles of distance might deliver him from temptation. But, after two days, he was drawn to Hampstead and, in his own phrase, "into the fire." Forty-eight hours later he indulged himself in the luxury of writing a love-letter

to see if this will assist in dismissing you from my mind for ever so short a time. Upon my soul, I can think of nothing else. . . . I cannot exist without you. I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again—my life seems to stop there—I see no further. You have absorb'd me.

Within the next seven days, of which he spent three under the Brawnes' own roof and two with one of the Brawnes' neighbours, he struck his flag and surrendered. The Westminster lodgings were given up, and he settled at Hampstead, next door to his beloved. "I shall be able to do nothing," he wrote. "I should like to cast the die for Love or Death."

Death overheard, and quickened his march. On the 3rd February, 1820, came the cough and the warning drop of blood. With his medical training, Keats could read the message. "It is arterial blood," he said, with a calmness which the



ISABELLA.

After W. Holman Hunt, R.A.

friend who heard him could never forget. "That drop of blood is my death-warrant. I must die."

Italy was a word of hope. In September the poet sailed for Naples in the noble company of the great-hearted young painter Joseph Severn. At Naples Keats tried hard to be brave and bright. But, now and again, his anguish blazed out : and here is surely one of the saddest letters ever written :—

I can bear to die—I cannot bear to leave her. . . .
Oh God, God, God ! Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear. The silk lining she put in my travelling cap scalds my head. My imagination is horribly vivid about her—I see her—I hear her. . . . Oh, I have coals of fire in my breast ! It surprises me that the human heart is capable of so much misery.

In England Keats had not been a religious man. From the fact that his three younger brothers were all christened in a batch, it may be inferred that his parents were not punctilious Christians : and there was something deeper than banter in Keats' note on his *Ode to Psyche* : "I am more orthodox than to let a heathen goddess

be so neglected." Accordingly it came to pass that he sought a non-Christian way of escape from the dark residue of a life unlit by any hopes of a life beyond. At Rome he entreated Severn to give him a bottle of laudanum which he had confided to his friend's care. Their funds were small, and the poet shrank even more from the troubles he was laying upon the young painter than from his own bodily pain and spiritual agony. But Severn, a devout believer, prevailed. Keats opened his heart to Christian faith and hope; and his last days were "like waters still'd at even." On 23rd February, 1821, he said, "I am dying. I shall die easy. Don't be frightened—be firm, and thank God it has come." The same night, as he slept, Death came: and, like Keats' own Porphyro,

Into the dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet.

He was laid in the Protestant Cemetery of Rome near the pyramid of Caius Cestius: and the loyal Severn, who outlived his friend for nearly sixty years, lies at his side.

Keats, as we have seen, was stirred up to write

by Spenser. He fondly believed that the spiritual presence of Shakespeare watched over him like a tenth muse or a guardian angel. His death was grandly sung by Shelley in the everlasting *Adonais*. His works became the fount from which was drawn half the inspiration of Tennyson. Thus was his prophecy fulfilled : and, backward and forward, to the right and to the left, he is linked for ever by untarnishable links "among the English Poets."

ALFRED TENNYSON

AS one of the Grand Old Men whose personalities dominated art and science, politics and religion, throughout the longest reign in English history, Alfred Tennyson both enriched and impoverished English poetry. He enriched it with very many very beautiful works: he impoverished it by so preoccupying the English mind with his long-drawn and dignified activity that younger growths of poetry have languished under his broad shadow for want of sun and air. From the instantly successful publication of *Locksley Hall* and *Ænone* in 1842 to the appearance of his play *The Foresters* in the year of his death, Tennyson filled during exactly half a century nearly all the scanty space which the English mind could spare from material progress and scientific investigation. Busy people had a comfortable feeling that the Poet-Laureate, or official idealist-in-chief, was the right man in the right place, and he sup-

plied them with so many volumes that they had no need to encourage irresponsibles. Besides, Tennyson's idealism was restful. Unlike Browning, he set no Chinese puzzles. His Liberalism was of the gentle order. He was neither a revolutionary, like the tumultuous and scandalous Byron and Shelley who had preceded him, nor an iconoclast of the accepted religion and morality, like the young Swinburne. He was the poet of law and order.

For this gentle rôle, his birth and social position prepared him. The staid representatives of things as they have been and as respectability decrees they ought to be in England are the country clergy; and Tennyson's father was a country clergyman and his mother a clergyman's daughter. His father, the Rev. Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, was the rector of Somersby, in Lincolnshire, and the poet was born at that village on 6th August, 1809.

Cowper found himself beginning to be a poet at fifty; in Tennyson the divine gift stirred from childhood. The rectory of Somersby was blessed with an atmosphere peculiarly fitted to encourage its growth. Alfred was the fourth

of twelve children, hardly one of whom was without the faculty of writing verse. The music of poesy was in him from the first. He tells us that before he could read he was in the habit on stormy days of spreading his arms to the wind and crying out, "I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind"; and the words "far, far away" had always a strange charm for him. His father was a man of artistic temperament and no mean culture, while his two elder brothers, Frederick and Charles, were possessed of fine poetic gifts, as is attested by the works they have left behind them. Charles especially (known as Charles Tennyson Turner) became the author of sonnets, the best of which can stand unafraid beside those of his more famous brother. Between him and Alfred there was ever a close intimacy of brain and heart, evidence of which was given to the world in 1826 by the publication of *Poems by Two Brothers*. When they were both children, Charles handed his brother a slate and bade him compose some verses about the flowers in the garden, and when the work was done, looked it over, and gave it his imprimatur with the words, "Yes, you can write."

A letter on Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, written by Tennyson to his aunt when he was only twelve years of age, betrays unusual knowledge and critical ability for so young a boy. Closing with a reference to Milton's use of the phrase—"The Gates of Azzar," he says :—

This probably, as Bp. Newton observes, was to avoid too great an alliteration, which the "Gates of Gaza" would have caused, though (in my opinion) it would have rendered it more beautiful : and (though I do not affirm it as a fact) perhaps Milton gave it that name for the sake of novelty, as all the world knows he was a great pedant. I have not, at present, time to write any more : perhaps I may continue my remarks in another letter to you : but (as I am very volatile and fickle) you must not depend upon me, for I think you do not know any one who is so fickle as

Your affectionate nephew,

A. TENNYSON.

At about this period he wrote an epic of six thousand lines in the style of Walter Scott. He said of it :—

Though the performance was very likely worth nothing I never felt myself more truly inspired. I wrote as much as seventy lines at one time and used to go shouting them about the fields in the dark.

There was merit enough in the poem to lead his father, a very competent judge, to exclaim, "If that boy dies, one of our greatest poets will have gone." Tennyson's grandmother used to assert that all Alfred's poetry came from her. When she passed away, his grandfather requested him to write a poem on her death. For this the old gentleman gave him half a guinea with the words, "Here is half a guinea for you, the first you have ever earned by poetry, and take my word for it, the last." Never was prophecy more astray: for, of all poets, few have been better remunerated than Alfred Tennyson.

In the childhood of this poet, as in that of Byron, there is made manifest the advantage of leaving a boy at liberty to browse on the contents of a well-furnished library. When Tennyson was seven years of age he was sent to a school at Louth. "How I did hate that school!" he remarked in after life. "The only good I ever got from it was the memory of the words *sonus desilientis aquae*, and of an old wall covered with wild weeds opposite the school windows." Here he remained only two years, and thenceforward, from nine to nineteen, was

under the tuition of his father, a competent scholar, and enough of a critic to give his son such sound advice as—"Don't write so rhythmically; break your lines occasionally for the sake of variety." Among the father's books some of those most read were Shakespeare, Milton, Burke, Goldsmith, Addison, Swift, Defoe, Bunyan, Rabelais, and Cervantes. Another favourite author with Charles and Alfred was Byron. When the news of Byron's death arrived in 1824—that is to say, when Tennyson was fourteen—the whole world seemed to be darkened for the boy, and in bitter distress he carved on a sandstone rock the words, "Byron is dead."

The keen observation of nature so manifest in his poetry was awakened in Tennyson as a child, and we are told by his son that he would reel off abundantly such lines as

When winds are east and violets blow,
And slowly stalks the parson crow.

And :—

The quick-wing'd gnat doth make a boat
Of his old husk wherewith to float
To a new life! all low things range
To higher! but I cannot change.

That he had the premonition of future eminence which is not uncommon to genius may be gathered from some words of his brother Arthur :—

Alfred and I often took long rambles together, and on one particular afternoon, when we were in the home fields talking of our respective futures, he said most emphatically, "Well, Arthur, I mean to be famous." . . . Like my father, Alfred had a great head, so that when I put on his hat it came down over my face. He too like my father had a powerful frame, a splendid physique.

Tennyson's mother also should perhaps have some of the credit of his fine appearance as well as his mental powers. He spoke of her as a "remarkable and saintly woman." She had been one of the beauties of the county. When nearly eighty and supposed to be deaf, a daughter was recounting her offers of marriage, and mentioned the number as twenty-four. "No, my dear," broke in emphatically the deaf old lady, "twenty-five."

In 1827 were published the *Poems by Two Brothers*, written when Charles was between sixteen and eighteen and Alfred between fifteen and seventeen. Of the £20 promised them



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SIR GALAHAD.

After G. F. Watts, R.A.

by Jackson, of Louth, their publishers, more than half had to be taken in books out of his shop. With part of the remainder the two youthful bards, on the afternoon of publication, hired a carriage and drove fourteen miles to Mablethorpe to share their triumph, as Charles said, with the winds and waves.

In February, 1828, Charles and Alfred Tennyson entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where Alfred remained until, in 1831, he was summoned home by the death of his father. Two things stand out in Tennyson's college course: the writing of the poem *Timbuctoo*, by which he gained the University prize of 1829, and the friendship he formed with Arthur Hallam. To the temporal rupture of that friendship by the death of Hallam in 1833 we owe *In Memoriam*, the choicest and ripest fruit of Tennyson's genius. Written in memory of his departed friend, it widened, during the seventeen years of its shaping, from the utterance of a personal grief into a deep and earnest discussion of the sorrow of the race. It exercised considerable influence on the thought of the day, its pathetic endeavour to hold on to

faith in God and immortality in face of the doubts begotten by the awful silence of death and the apparent heartlessness of Nature, finding a response in many minds. Tennyson himself said :—

The sections were written at many different places, and as the phases of our intercourse came to my memory and suggested them. I did not write them with any view of weaving them into a whole, or for publication, until I found that I had written so many. The different moods of sorrow as in a drama are dramatically given, and my conviction that fear, doubts, and suffering will find answer and relief only through Faith in a God of Love.

In Memoriam was published in 1850. Five years previously a pension of £200 per annum had been granted to the poet, “a mark,” as Sir Robert Peel put it, “of royal favour to one who had devoted to worthy objects great intellectual powers.” In three years more, when he was but forty-four, his income from his poems had reached £500 a year. It must not be supposed, however, that poverty and hardship and sorrow had neglected to take part in his emotional education. A few years before the grant of the pension, he had succumbed to

the lures of a tempter and had sold all his little property so as to invest in "The Patent Decorative Carving Company," which promptly failed and left him without a penny. What sharpened the thrust of this misfortune was the fact that he was on the point of becoming betrothed to Miss Emily Sellwood. He had turned thirty and had no profession save poetry. The shock so unmanned him that, for a time, his life was in danger. But hydropathy administered first at Cheltenham, and, again after a relapse, at Prestbury, wooed him back to health, while the pension delivered him from straits so close that one of his biographers declares him to have endured "the most grinding poverty."

The year that witnessed the publication of *In Memoriam* was also signalized by Tennyson's appointment to the now honourable office of Poet-Laureate in succession to Wordsworth. The first outcome of his new appointment was the Ode on the death of the Duke of Wellington, in which occur the two well-known lines, with their unhappy taint of doggerel :—

Not once or twice in our rough island-story
The path of duty was the way to glory.

Fulfilling the saying that big things happen in threes, the year 1850 saw not only the publication of *In Memoriam* and Tennyson's accession to the Laureateship, but also his marriage with the constant Emily Sellwood, to whose sister Louisa his brother Charles had been united in 1836. Of this loyal wife he remarked in after years, "The peace of God came into my life before the altar when I wedded her." The marriage was celebrated at Shiplake on the Thames in the quietest fashion, both cake and dresses arriving too late ; but the poet described it as "the nicest wedding" he had ever been at. During the drive from Shiplake to Pangbourne he wrote some playful verses to the clergyman who had performed the ceremony. Here are the first two :—

Vicar of this pleasant spot

Where it was my chance to marry,

Happy, happy be your lot

In the Vicarage by the quarry.

You were he that knit the knot !

Sweetly, smoothly flow your life,

Never tithe unpaid perplex you,

Parish feud, or party strife,

All things please you, nothing vex you,

You have given me such a wife.

Tennyson shared with Wordsworth the felicity, unusual in the records of great poets, of enjoying for many years a happy home life. Farringford in the Isle of Wight, with its charming views of sea and capes and downs and park, afforded him a delightful resting-place for forty years. Here much of his best known work was wrought, including *Maud*, *The Idylls of the King*, *Enoch Arden*, and many shorter poems. Solitude he prized greatly, and claimed always a due share of it for reading and meditation, but he had also a keen appreciation of the pleasures of social intercourse, and numbered most of the notable people of the day among his friends and visitors. His laugh was full and sonorous, and he had a gift for the telling of humorous stories, particularly those that owed their raciness to a spice of the Lincolnshire dialect, such as the farmer's prayer: "Oh God, send us rain, and especially on John Stubbs's field in the middle marsh, and if Thou doest not know it, it has a big thorn tree in the middle of it."

Phillips Brooks has given us in his journal a pleasant picture of Tennyson and his dwell-

ing place, Farringford, as he found them in 1883 :—

He is finer than his pictures, a man of good six feet and over, but stooping as he walks, for he is seventy-four years old, and we shall stoop if we ever live to that age. A big dome of a head, bald on the forehead and the top, and very fine to look at. A deep bright eye, a grand eagle nose, a mouth which you cannot see, a black felt hat, and a loose tweed suit. These were what I noticed in the author of *In Memoriam*. The house is a delightful old rambling thing, whose geography one never learns, not elegant but very comfortable, covered with pictures inside and ivies outside, with superb ilexes and other trees about it, and lovely pieces of view over the Channel here and there.

Of the poet's other house, Aldworth, near Haslemere, the lines addressed to Sir Edward Hamley, as a prologue to *The Charge of the Heavy Brigade*, afford a pleasant, autumnal glimpse :—

Our birches yellowing, and from each
The light leaf falling fast,
While squirrels from our fiery beech
Were bearing off the mast.
You came, and look'd, and loved the view,
Long known and loved by me,
Green Sussex fading into blue
With one gray glimpse of sea.

The poet spent his days alternately between these two lovely homes, of late years generally remaining at Farringford till the end of June, and then removing to the more bracing air of Aldworth.

In 1883 Tennyson was created Baron of Freshwater and Aldworth, his own remark being, "By Gladstone's advice I have consented to take the peerage ; but for my own part I shall regret my simple name all my life."

Tennyson died at Aldworth on 6th October, 1892, aged eighty-three years. Great peace marked his end. "Where is my Shakespeare? I must have my Shakespeare." These, and "I want the blinds up, I want to see the sky and the light!" were almost his last words. Shakespeare, the sky, the light: an unconscious cry for what had been the sustenance of his life—Humanity, Nature, Truth. He was buried, amid universal mourning, in Westminster Abbey, on 12th October.

In his poetry, Tennyson was the fine flower of gentle Englishry as it existed before it had been acted upon by the powerful solvents which are fast transmuting it into a new thing. The decay of agriculture, the dwarfing of landed interests beside the huge fortunes made by in-

dustrial and high-financial processes, the abridging of privilege, and the granting of scanty education and abundant political power to the masses of the people have replaced Tennyson's England by an England in which he could not have felt at home. Large tracts of Tennyson's England are already as remote as Spenser's faëryland. But, for this very reason, his work will always be valuable, not only as poetry, but as a document. He has expressed both sides of the Victorian idealism—the looking back to medieval faith and chivalry on the one hand, and the looking forward into the new world apparently opened by the doctrine of Darwin on the other.

Regarded purely as a poet, it must be said that his benefactors were bigger men than his heirs. He inherited his feeling for nature and his instinct for fine workmanship from Wordsworth and Keats: but what he received from major poets he has passed on to minors. Indeed, it may ultimately be reckoned as his most remarkable achievement that he raised incalculably the level of minor poetry and thus made it hard for major poets to stand head and shoulders above their brethren.

ROBERT BROWNING

WHEN George the Fourth was king a lad stopped one day outside a second-hand bookseller's shop in London and gaped at a placard reading :—

MR. SHELLEY'S ATHEISTICAL POEM

VERY SCARCE.

The words bit into the lad's mind. At first he believed that "Mr. Shelley" was a *nom de guerre*, but at last he found that a Shelley had truly existed, and had written books, and was dead. Without emphasizing the atheism, the lad begged his mother to buy him Shelley's works. But the local booksellers had never heard Shelley's name, and it was only after a persevering search that the obliging mamma found what she wanted at a shop in Vere Street, alongside the equally dusty "remainder" of another dead author named John Keats. She bought the books of both poets

and took them home to her son, whose name was Robert Browning.

English, Scottish, and German blood mingled in the veins of Robert Browning, and his best poems were written in Italy, France, and Russia. According to people who knew him, he came to acquire North Italian gestures and manners through his long sojourn in that country. Probably this cosmopolitanism is partly to blame for the fact that Browning preferred to express himself in rather jerky English, and that, although he had a native gift of melody, he rarely allowed himself to sing as a melodious poet. To be a joy for ever poetry must be a thing of beauty. It was unfortunate, also, that Browning lived and worked at a time when Carlyle's substitute for the English language was being admired : for his mamma's gifts of books by Keats seem to have been thrown away on a poet who deliberately devised a gawky idiom for the expression of his most gracious thoughts.

Robert Browning was born in London on 7th May, 1812. His father and grandfather had held posts in the Bank of England, and, as well-to-do members of the middle-class, Robert's

parents were able to indulge him when he decided to follow no profession save poetry. His education, after his fifteenth year, was mainly of the self-helping, browsing order, with the result that his memory was surfeited with out-of-the-way facts, while his brain was under-drilled as regards hard mental discipline.

Browning came of age and rushed into print in the same year. Hearing that he had written a poem, an aunt came forward with the funds necessary for publishing *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession*. It was sent forth anonymously and with a full apparatus of mystery, but the British public remained cold. After a long jaunt in Russia and Italy, Browning returned to London and published *Paracelsus*, which won him the acquaintance of many literary men, and led to the writing of *Strafford*, a tragedy which ran for five nights with Macready in the title-rôle. *Strafford* is neither good poetry nor good drama. Moreover, it is chilly. But *Strafford* was only the raw, dark hour before the warm, bright dawn. During a journey in Italy, which ensued upon its failure, Browning wrote many of the best of the lyrics by which his fame will be kept alive.

The piping times when an unknown young poet could walk into a publisher's office with a manuscript and walk out again with ten pounds were drawing to a close. The young Wordsworth and the young Coleridge had received thirty guineas for lyrical ballads: Keats had sold the copyright of *Endymion* for £100; and even Browning's young contemporaries, the brothers Tennyson, had sold a book for £20, half in cash and half in kind. But with the author of *Pauline* things were different. Hard-hearted publishers declined to take risks, and after the failure of his almost unintelligible *Sordello* in 1840, young Browning jumped at the offer of the publisher Moxon to print—though at the author's expense—his further works, cheaply as pamphlets in double columns. This was the origin of *Bells and Pomegranates* (1841-6), of which eight numbers appeared. One was *Pippa Passes*. Parts of this remarkable little miracle-play have been praised without discrimination. For example, in Pippa's famous song, the line "The hillside's dew-pearl'd" is stiff and unsingable, and was obviously concocted to make some sort of a rhyme with "world." But, as a whole, *Pippa*



ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

From a Crayon drawing made in Rome in 1859, by Field Talfourd.

Passes will stand very high among the greater poems of the Victorian era ; and Elizabeth Barrett showed herself a sound critic when she told her wooer that of all his poems *Pippa Passes* was the one she would have been most proud to write. Browning never excelled these lines about the storm :—

Buried in woods we lay, you recollect ;
Swift ran the searching tempest overhead ;
And ever and anon some bright white shaft
Burned through the pine-tree roof, here burned and there,
As if God's messenger thro' the close wood screen
Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,
Feeling for guilty thee and me : then broke
The thunder like a whole sea overhead.

During Browning's third visit to Italy, Elizabeth Barrett published a book of poems in which *Bells and Pomegranates* and their author were mentioned. In one of the poems, *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, Lady Geraldine's tiresome lover was declared to have read aloud :—

At times a modern volume, Wordsworth's solemn-thoughted
idyl,
Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's enchanted reverie,
Or from Browning some pomegranate, which, if cut deep down
the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured of a veined humanity.

Considered as poetry, this unspeakable quatrain was bad enough to repel Browning for ever, but considered as a compliment from a woman who had succeeded to a man who had failed, it was mellifluous and of a sweet smell. So Browning wrote Miss Barrett a letter. He had never seen her, but he plunged in boldly, saying, "I love your books and I love you too."

To say, as some have said, that there is "no more beautiful love-story" than Robert Browning's is to misuse a word. Christopher Marlowe taught that the only true love was love at first sight : but love before first sight is against nature and savours more of the head than of the heart. Nevertheless, the story is deeply touching, and highly creditable to both the lovers. Elizabeth Barrett was an invalid, without bodily beauty, imprisoned in a room from which the light and the free air were banished. Robert Browning was in buoyant health, a rider, a dancer, and a bit of a dandy. But he stood by his first declaration and proposed marriage. Miss Barrett, though in love, hesitated to take him at his word ; and even when a perfect understanding between the pair had been arrived at, there was a

further obstacle. Miss Barrett's selfish and obstinate father was determined that none of his children should marry. That they should even wish to do so he called "unfilial treachery." In the long run the knot was cut by an elopement. The bride slipped out of the house one September morning in 1846, and was quietly married in Marylebone Church. After the ceremony she returned home as if nothing had happened : but a week later she and the bridegroom fled to Paris. Her father never forgave her ; her letters were left for ever unopened, and even on the birth of her son—his grandson—he ignored her overtures for reconciliation.

At the time of the wedding the husband was thirty-four and the wife forty-one. Fortunately the lady was possessed of a little money in her own right, and therefore was able to dissuade Browning from his plan of working for a living outside the flowery but unfruitful fields of poetry. Besides, one John Kenyon, a cousin of the bride and an old schoolfellow of the bridegroom's father, had acted as a go-between in the first stage of the love affair, and he settled £100 a year on the newly-wedded couple. Ten years

later he died, and left the two poets £11,000. Mrs. Browning's books were widely sold, and, accordingly, her husband was never once thwarted in his designs upon poetry throughout his long life of seven-and-seventy years.

From Florence, where the pair lived happily until 1861, Browning did not send forth many verses. Indeed, in eighteen years he published no more than *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, and the two remarkable volumes called *Men and Women*. But Mrs. Browning's death both brought him back to England and stirred him to action. He wrought at his poetry for three hours every morning, and provided a small but ever widening circle of admirers with a long series of good, bad, and indifferent poems. Much of his writing was done in villages and small towns of France; and, in that country, at least two striking experiences broke the otherwise tame flow of his life. On one occasion he and Tennyson, who were travelling quite independently of one another, both missed the same French train and thus escaped a railway accident in which many people were killed. On another occasion, in 1871, the tide of German victories began to set

so strongly towards the coast-village where Browning was sunning himself with his family that he was forced to flee in a cattle-boat from the mouth of the Seine.

Little by little the general public became aware of Browning's industry. *The Ring and the Book* woke people up by its very audacity. To write twenty thousand lines all about a forgotten Italian murder-trial, and to publish them in four volumes, was a thing which poets did not do every day. Those who not only gossiped about this novelty, but also read it, found that it was nearly all good reading, and often good poetry. They found that Browning's much-blamed obscurity darkened very few of the twenty thousand lines, and that the poet had succeeded in his attempt to make ten different persons tell the same story in ten different ways, each for his own ends or from his own point of view. For a work of this kind Browning was well endowed. As his *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personæ* had proved, he had the gift of getting inside the hearts of his real or imaginary personages and of expressing the thoughts and feelings they ought to have had. This power of becoming ever so

many different people in turn is half of the equipment of every great dramatist, the other half being his ability to make his personages act and inter-act in a convincing manner till the inevitable, emotional climax is reached. The gods had denied the second gift to Robert Browning, but *The Ring and the Book* exists to prove that he possessed the first in a supreme degree.

In certain of Browning's later works, such as *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, some of the old obscurity returned. The obscurity was not usually wilful. It arose from a habit of trying to invest out-of-the-way and fugitive and unimportant thoughts with the dignity and permanence of poetic classics. Unfortunately the little bands of studious disciples who formed Browning societies to pore over his least valuable works were not as a rule lovers of poetry so much as followers of Ruskin, turning works of art inside out to find "helpful thoughts," "messages" "teaching," and all sorts of things with which the simple, sensuous, passionate art of poetry has only collateral relations. Happily, however, there are signs of a wholesome change, and Browning is beginning to be treasured for the sake of the many poems

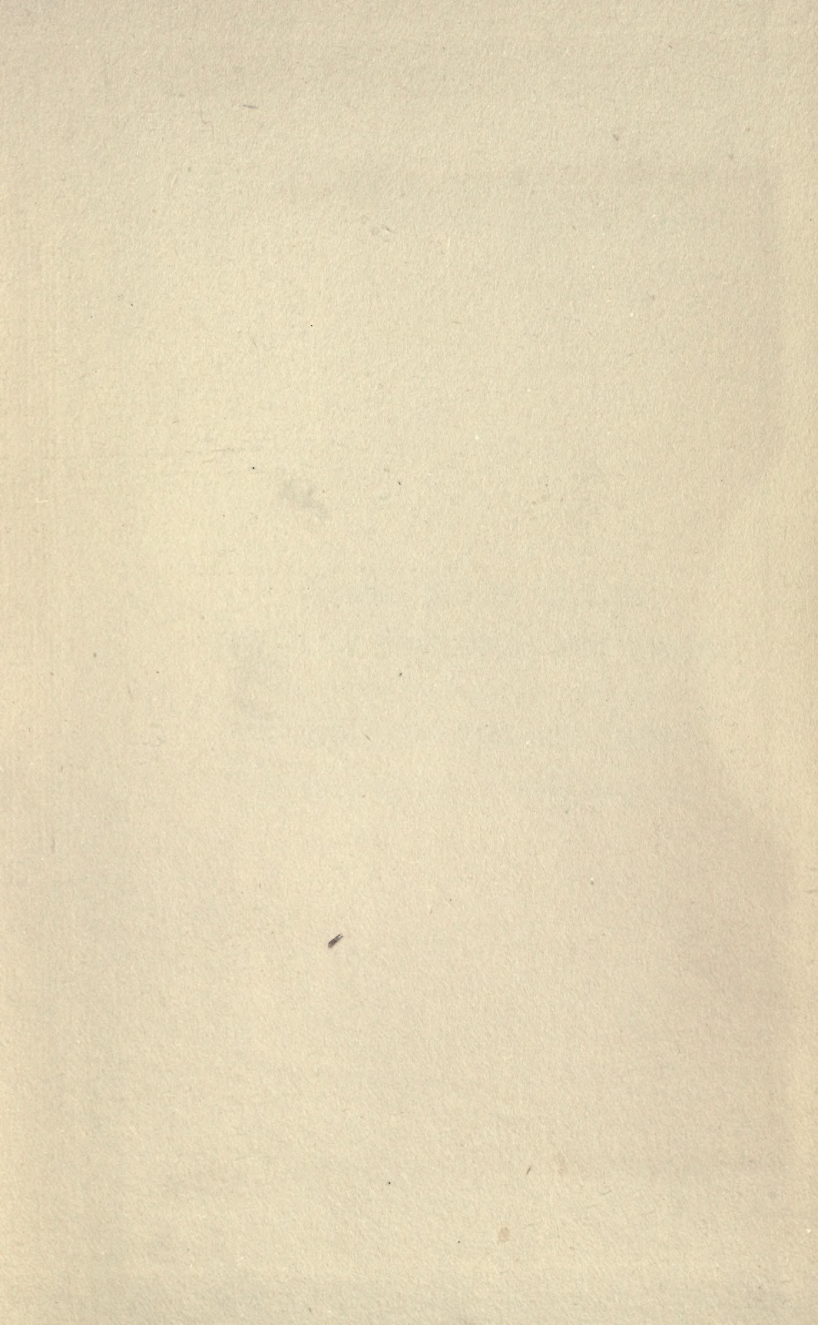
in which he treated broad human themes clear-headedly and full-heartedly. Long after *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* and *Pacchiarotto* have found decent graves Browning will be held in honour for the haunting melody and sterling tenderness of *Evelyn Hope*, for the straightforward manfulness of *Prospice*, and for the "fine careless rapture" of *Home Thoughts from Abroad*.

Browning died in Venice, and was buried on the last day of 1889, among poets greater and smaller than himself, in Westminster Abbey. In the bulk of his work mannerism so often took the place of style that he has founded no school. Tennyson called him "a great thinker in verse," and added :—

He has plenty of music in him, but he cannot get it out. He has intellect enough for a dozen of us ; but he has not got the glory of words.

Nevertheless, he enlarged the poetical statement of romantic love, and the English poetry of the future will not proceed as if he had never existed.

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